

SAME SONG DIFFERENT SWING: A
CHURCH'S JOURNEY TOWARDS
RACIAL HARMONY

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A FINAL PROJECT SUBMITTED TO
THE DOCTORAL STUDIES COMMITTEE
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
Dayton, Ohio
May 2020

**United Theological Seminary
Dayton, OH**

**Faculty Approval Page
Doctor of Ministry Final Project**

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ABSTRACT

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Germantown United Methodist Church (GUMC) is located in Germantown, Tennessee. GUMC, like many mainline congregations, remains racially homogenous despite the fact that its surrounding communities are becoming more diverse. GUMC can only break racial barriers by intentionally fostering authentic relationships with people of color, while cultivating a deeper understanding and sensitivity to racial issues that plague society. GUMC and neighboring mainline congregations met over the course of several months to uncover solutions. Conversations led to the planning of a unity service that took place on Juneteenth. Focus group discussions, cultural competency assessments, a survey, and a questionnaire guided the study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am thankful for the dear parishioners who embarked on this journey with me from Germantown United Methodist Church, New Bethel Missionary Baptist Church, Germantown Presbyterian Church, and El Redentor United Methodist Church. I praise God for your candor and courage. Thank you for your gifts, your insights, and your time in cultivating new ways to become bridge builders for our community.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the greatest being of this existence who never ceases to amaze me; my dear God who has walked alongside me every step of the way. I thank God for placing the stirrings in my heart to pursue this work and for thinking enough of me to use me in such a special way.

I think it's one of the tragedies of our nation that 11 o'clock on Sunday morning is one the most segregated, if not the most segregated, hours in Christian America.
— Martin Luther King Jr.

INTRODUCTION

This research is centered on the study of racial segregation in the mainline church, specifically the United Methodist Church which is the context for pastoral ministry. This study is necessary as the nation is becoming increasingly diverse and churches do not reflect this shift. This should be of concern for racially segregated churches because it sends a message to their communities about who they do and do not value. It is the researcher's contention that churches should at least consider ways to foster a welcoming environment for all people, being aware and sensitive to the racial disparities that plague their communities.

The need in the context explored is the fact that Germantown United Methodist Church (UMC), along with most U.S. mainline churches, remains racially homogenous despite the fact that the community and the greater Memphis area are becoming more diverse. This remains problematic for the church at large because racial segregation does not align with Jesus' message. The hypothesis that guided the development of the project is the assumption that GUMC can only break racial barriers by intentionally fostering authentic relationships with people of color, while cultivating a deeper understanding and sensitivity to racial issues that plague society.

The biblical foundations chapter, 1 Corinthians 12:2-26, was selected as the research text. Paul's message to the Corinthians is also a message for the contemporary, American church. Like the Corinthians, current day Christians are also trying to find their

way, to understand where and how God is calling them to be the church; and like the Corinthians, they struggle with differences. Like the Corinthians, they fail to love their neighbors. Like the Corinthians, they fail to recognize, at times, the gifts one may possess because one cannot get beyond his or her outward appearance. The church has reached a point of no return and at this point in the life of the church, they cannot afford to be silent and tone deaf when it comes to social and even political issues. The mainline church assumes that it is still ok to be racially divided when society is becoming diverse rapidly; and society is paying attention. For the project, the participants will spend some time together, utilizing this text, in discussing what it means to embrace the other, valuing the gifts that all people have to offer the body of Christ.

For the historical foundations chapter, the history behind the evolution of Black Christianization in America and White Christians' resistance in response to that evolution was explored. The researcher traced the racist footsteps of Christians throughout early American history, from the refusal to baptize African slaves to the refusal to ordain black preachers. The researcher also explains how violence against black Christians increased heavily during the Reconstruction period, as black Christians were building their churches, establishing their own Christian identity. The Klu Klux Klan (KKK), an alleged Christian organization at the time, was known to largely target black pastors, who were not simply leaders of black churches but also pillars of black communities. The history of race and its ties to American Christianity is vital for the project because it uncovers the root of the issues regarding race that we are facing in churches today. Christian American history explains why we struggle when it comes to racial harmony. For centuries, black people in this country have given their every being in chasing justice

and equality, and though there were white societies and movements that worked tirelessly to help black people gain their rights, the white mainline churches were mostly at the forefront of black oppression in and out of the church. Before humanity can begin conversations regarding diversity and racial healing, we must come to grips with the racist past.

In a similar vein, the theological foundations chapter explores how theology has been misused by Christians to perpetuate violence against minorities. The research places and emphasis on the Imago Dei, the notion that all people are made in the image of God and have sacred worth. This chapter discussed how Christian misuse of theology to disenfranchise minorities is a violation of the Imago Dei and has sinful implications. This information is also pertinent to the project because the congregants should understand that historically, white Christians have been complicit to the point of using their faith to justify their racist behaviors.

For the interdisciplinary chapter, critical race theory (CRT) was discussed as it relates to how it can be utilized by the church in pursuing racial reconciliation and church diversity. Critical race scholarship has been applied largely to the fields of education and law but the church can find critical race pedagogy as a useful tool in considering how the church may perpetuate or support racism. Critical race theory methods consider how institutions have the potential to oppress minorities and or irritate race relations. Critical race theory can encourage the congregation to look inward, challenging their assumptions and practices, but it can also encourage the congregation to look outwardly, considering the inequality happening around them every single day and how they might be a part of racial healing.

Each chapter explores a factor related to racial segregation in the church that was discussed in the focus group sessions. These various dynamics are largely unknown by the church. The congregation specifically is not aware of the Methodist Church's racist past and were shocked to find out that the Methodist Episcopal Church could never come to a consensus on racial desegregation. The researcher was curious to find whether or not the sharing and processing of this information will impact their perceptions regarding homogenous worship for the better.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

As I reflected over my life experiences while writing my spiritual autobiography, it was apparent to me that God had been doing something very intentional with my life over the years. I developed a passion for multiculturalism, brought forth by my encounters with race. I grew up in a black church but attended classes with mostly white students from the fourth grade through college. I lived, as W.E.B. Dubois would call it, a double consciousness for most of my life without even realizing it. The racial division I encountered brought forth a desire to advocate for a world that is not so divided, especially by skin color. I realized that ignorance has been a significant component in racial division and the first step in breaking racial barriers is to create nurturing spaces where people of various ethnic groups can learn about each other's backgrounds and grow to appreciate them. I believe that my life experiences have shaped me to lead my congregation and community in breaking those barriers effectively. For my project, I desire to develop a long-term plan with my predominantly white congregation in embracing diversity more authentically. My congregation is located in a small, predominantly white city located right outside of a predominantly black city, where many of them, especially the millennials, are relocating. They should seek enough understanding to the point where people of color feel welcome to join their faith community.

Context

I am currently serving as the Associate Pastor of Germantown United Methodist Church (GUMC). It is the second largest congregation within the Memphis Conference of the United Methodist connection. The church averages about 700 members in regular worship attendance while there are 3800 members on roll. GUMC is very affluent, as is the city of Germantown, and the average age of the membership is approximately fifty which is slightly above the average age of the town.

According to the 2010 Census report, “There were 38,844 people, 14,910 households, and 11,750 families residing in the city, with 15,536 housing units. The racial makeup of the city was 89.54% White, 3.57% Black, 0.21% Native American, 5.15% Asian, 0.02% Pacific Islander, 0.42% from other races, and 1.07% from two or more races. Hispanic or Latino of any race were 1.89% of the population.”¹ Within the 3-mile radius of the church, 25.64 percent of the population is African American; 64.63 percent are white; 4.26 percent are Asian; 4.09 percent are Hispanic, and 1.39 percent are Pacific Islander, Indian, or other.² All of these ethnic groups have increased in population size except for the white ethnic group. They have slightly decreased over the past seven years and are expected to decline by .64 percent by 2022.³ The three-mile radius of the church is slightly more diverse than the city of Germantown.

¹ “2010 US Census Bureau,” Web Archive, accessed October 30, 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20130911234518/http://factfinder2.census.gov/>.

² “QuickInsite Report,” Mission Insite PeopleView System, accessed October 30, 2017, <https://maps.missioninsite.com/Maps.aspx>.

³ “QuickInsite Report,” Mission Insite PeopleView System, accessed October 30, 2017, <https://maps.missioninsite.com/Maps.aspx>.

If GUMC sincerely desires to be a community church, the ethnic makeup should mirror the community. If over twenty-five percent of the population surrounding the church is African American, the church should reflect that, but currently, we only have two active black families and no other families of color. I honestly believe that most people in my congregation would not be opposed to seeing more people of color, but because they do not encounter people of color on a regular basis, they do not know how to embrace them. I am the only black person that many of them see regularly. In the class that I taught on racism in the fall of 2017, many of the attendees admitted to me that they were raised in white communities, all over the country, might I add, so this is not simply a southern dynamic.

I also noted that more people of color are expected to move to Germantown within the next ten years while the white population will continue to decline, though they will continue to be the majority. MissionInsite reports that many black millennials are moving into the area. They are identified as the urban ambition segment. “These young (under 35) African American singles (and some single parents) are striking out on their own, and most have entry-level, low paying jobs in retail and service.”⁴ While no one in my congregation could personally identify with these individuals, over 3,000 of them have moved into Germantown recently. I would love to discuss with my congregation how we might devise a plan to embrace them. If the church knows that there are people of color moving into their neighborhood they should have the tools to do the legwork to ensure that their residents know they are welcome to be a part of their faith community, even if they do not feel that they can relate to them on personal or economic levels.

⁴ Thomas G. Bandy, “Urban Ambition,” Mission Impact Guide 2.0, accessed October 20, 2017, http://missioninsite.com/PDF_Files/O52%20Urban%20Ambition.pdf.

The median income for a household in Germantown was \$112, 979 while the median family income was \$127, 216. The average household income within the three-mile radius in 2017 was 106, 512 and is expected to increase to \$117, 806 by 2022.⁵ Conversations regarding race are necessary for both the community and my congregation because race is not always as important as class. It is a very affluent area, and socioeconomic status certainly has more weight. Racial issues and the intersection with economic issues often go unnoticed because they are not factors in this area for many. They do not impact most of the people who live in Germantown. I do not believe it is realistic to expect these individuals to maintain a deep passion and sensitivity for issues they do not understand or see with their own eyes. This is why I think it is so crucial for them to have vital conversations with people of color. Several members have shared with me that many of their peers do not believe that racism still exists and I think that has everything to do with the fact that their current realities shield them from seeing it. If I grew up in a white bubble, where virtually no brown people existed, I imagine I might also have difficulty grasping racism as reality rather than myth. Exposure is pertinent to dismantling bigotry and ignorance regarding racial issues.

A Pew Research study in 2015 reported that the United Methodist Church is ninety-four percent white and is among the least diverse religious groups in the U.S.⁶ Our book of resolutions includes a statement on racism, yet we have not attracted more people of color. Perhaps the church is still feeling the sting of its history of

⁵ “QuickInsite Report,” Mission Insite PeopleView System, accessed October 30, 2017, <https://maps.missioninsite.com/Maps.aspx>.

⁶ “How Racially Diverse Are U.S. Religious Groups?” Pew Research Center, accessed December 14, 2017, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/07/27/the-most-and-least-racially-diverse-u-s-religious-groups/ft_15-07-23_religiondiversityindex-1/.

intentionally limiting black churches' authority by way of the central jurisdiction — this a history that many United Methodists know nothing about. In a previously led class on race, my congregants articulated they were unaware that the UMC had done anything to disenfranchise black people. They were shocked when I shared this history with them. Some members did not have a clue, and they had been Methodists for decades. I think it is important for my church to understand the denomination's history so that they can fully understand what we honestly face in becoming diverse, not merely as a homogenous congregation, but as a United Methodist one as well.

An article published from *Christianity Today* by Bob Smietana cited LifeWay's research on diversity within U.S. churches. "More than eight in ten congregations are made up of one predominant racial group. Two-thirds of American churchgoers (sixty-seven percent) say their church is doing enough to become racially diverse. More than half (fifty-three percent) disagree with the statement, 'My church needs to become more ethnically diverse.'"⁷ This represents another challenge that I believe my congregation faces in embracing diversity. They are not on the same page about this need. In my class on race, where we explored series one of the Commission on Religion and Race's study, *Vital Conversations on Race*, most of the sixteen attendees were white female and liberal members who were over the age of fifty. One young adult couple from the black Baptist church down the road attended as well. I felt that I was preaching to the choir because these were some of the most liberal and progressive people in the entire church. I found it quite interesting that none of the

⁷ Bob Smietana, "Sunday Morning Segregation," *Christianity Today*, accessed December 14, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2015/january/sunday-morning-segregation-most-worshippers-church-diversity.html>.

men in the church attended the study. Within the past couple of weeks, I have been presenting the same material to a young adult Sunday school class where there are several men. I have been paying very close attention to them. About half of them have responded positively to the material while the other half has been entirely silent. One had difficulty grasping the material and has offered great pushback in both of the sessions so far. This dynamic speaks to the fact that we all have our own opinions about the issues and that diversity is not a priority for many. There are members within my congregation who can take it or leave it. There are also members who want the race issue to dissolve itself. For example, when the conflict in Charlottesville arose, many clergy expressed the need to rewrite the sermons for Sunday morning. Our senior pastor did not feel led to do that and did not address the issue in worship at all that Sunday. Some members were relieved that he did not address it because some view the church as a place where they can go to get away from the troubles of the world. Others, on the other hand, were disappointed in him for avoiding the subject. My congregation is a mixed bag on all of the issues, political and social. I have pondered over what is realistic for this congregation because, to bring change, I believe it is essential to have everyone on board.

In my opinion, because we are United Methodists and the church has made a stance on racism, we should do what we can to uphold that stance by embracing the other. Embracing diversity would enable my congregation to maintain a greater sense of identity as Methodists. Many of us know that the founder of Methodism was an advocate for social justice and refused to consume any good that was produced under slave labor. It is dire for Methodists to reclaim who we say we are to the world.

I also believe that there is a need for my project because many of my parishioners have personally expressed to me a desire in becoming more diverse, but they do not know where to start. I explained to them that GUMC has to decide together what the “how” needs to look like and that we would have to figure it out together as a team. Our congregation must take a close look at the specific needs of our community and determine what the next steps should be. I cannot imagine there is a perfect formula or strategy that works for every church. Several members have joined a community group called Partners in Christ. It includes our church and a white Presbyterian church that is located right across the street. It also includes two black churches, one is Baptist, and the other is Christian Methodist Episcopal. All of the churches are located in Germantown. The group was organized nearly two years ago, and they meet periodically to discuss racial and social issues. I was asked to lead this group when my former senior pastor, who developed the group, retired. GUMC has already begun relationships with black churches in the area, and I believe the partnership will be integral for our learnings and plan for diversity moving forward.

This year, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that white students made up less than 50% of the national public school population in 2014.⁸ This percentage is expected to decrease to 45% by the year 2026.⁹ Black students made up 16% and are expected to decrease by only 1 percent before 2026.¹⁰ The

⁸ “Racial-Ethnic Enrollment in Public Schools,” National Center for Education Statistics, accessed December 14, 2017, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cge.asp.

⁹ “Racial-Ethnic Enrollment in Public Schools,” National Center for Education Statistics, accessed December 14, 2017, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cge.asp.

¹⁰ “Racial-Ethnic Enrollment in Public Schools,” National Center for Education Statistics, accessed December 14, 2017, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cge.asp.

percentages for Hispanic and Asian students will continue to grow.¹¹ Germantown has three public schools, and they are predominantly black. I mentioned in my contextual analysis that the public high school is the worst building I have seen in the entire city. The city also has nine municipal and private schools. Most of the children in the city are attending schools where they hardly encounter children of other ethnicities. Their neighborhoods and churches are also predominantly white. This can be problematic when many of them leave home for college, they encounter people of color in ways they never had growing up. I attended a small liberal arts college in Jackson, Mississippi where most of the white students had attended private schools for K-12. Many of them avoided the black students, and I do not know if it was because they were racist or because they did not know how to interact with them. In addition to this dynamic, we now have three generations of people who did not live through the Civil Rights Movement, Generations X, Y, and Z. At least my parents lived through desegregation and could attest to the challenges our country faced with race over the years. Issues regarding race may not be as overt as they use to be and this causes some young people to assume that the issues no longer exist. Some of our darkest days in racial history are ones that we did not live to see. For this reason, I had the most difficulty discussing race with my white millennial peers because somehow in many of their minds, my life experiences are debatable. I encountered young people who are incredibly brazen and aloof to racial issues.

The church has an opportunity to expose our young people to the issues and equip them in becoming more cultured and well-rounded individuals. Our

¹¹ "Racial-Ethnic Enrollment in Public Schools," National Center for Education Statistics, accessed December 14, 2017, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cge.asp.

congregation has already committed to equipping our children for the world holistically. We offer retreats for preteens where we discuss sex and drugs. If we are bold enough to discuss sex and drugs with our adolescents because we understand the need for that, then we should be just as bold when it comes to issues regarding race.

As previously mentioned, Germantown is located right outside of Memphis and GUMC maintains partnerships with several local charities and organizations. Developing a plan for diversity would enable them to foster more profound and more sincere relationships with the people of color who they serve and serve with. A young member shared with me that he wonders how people feel about them when they come to serve at one of the local soup kitchens. He expressed concern that perhaps people assume they come merely to say that they did a good deed and not because they have a sincere interest and concern for them. I told him that he should ask them the next time he goes. He said he never thought about asking them. It would be nice to feel comfortable enough with a group of people to ask questions such as those.

When interviewing the first woman senior pastor of GUMC, I asked if there were people who resisted her initially but later acknowledged that they were wrong about her. She explained that many had a change of heart and expressed the fact that they developed a deeper understanding of what it truly means to be Methodist. I believe that a plan for ethnic diversity could do the same thing for GUMC.

Ministry Journey

In my spiritual autobiography, I recalled my first encounter with racism, and I believe it sparked the beginning of my ongoing desire for racial unity. The Mississippi

Gulf Coast, my home, can be considered the most diverse region of the state. The coast is the home to several military bases, and people from all over the world live there. Most of my friends were children of service men and women and were incredibly cultured because they had lived in many places but every now and again, I encountered someone who was not as progressive as my close friends. When I was six years old, I took swimming lessons with my brother at a public recreation center. One morning, while we were waiting in the pool for the instructor to arrive, I approached two little white girls who were playing in the pool. One girl began to play with me while the other girl made faces at me. The little girl who had received me encouraged her friend to join us. Her friend stressed that she could not play with me because I was black and quickly moved to the other side of the pool. The girl looked confused for a moment, but she quickly caught on and met her friend on the other side of the pool. I will never forget the feeling that I felt at that moment. I honestly believed that I had done something wrong by being black. I am not even sure that I knew I was black before that encounter.

I shared this story with several of the parishioners who attended the course on race. Many were shocked to hear of my childhood experience mainly because it happened in the 1990s. I believe my story reflects the truth about racism that it is not a thing of the past, and even young people struggle with issues regarding race. This represents the type of stories that they need to hear; the stories that have the potential to transform uninformed assumptions about how racism exists or does not exist in the world today.

I believe this work is a part of my calling. I have found myself in white places most of my life, but for a long time, I found that challenging. For a while, it was difficult being the only brown person among a sea of white people, but I learned how to adjust and

eventually thrive in those spaces. Over the years, they became my closest companions. I believe that God is calling me of all people to lead this effort in my congregation because I've learned how to communicate with people from an array of backgrounds. When discussing difficult issues in the church, I think it is important for congregations to have a leader that they trust, one that they can relate to. I certainly cannot relate to being white, but because I have spent so much of my life with them over the years, I believe I understand how to approach the issues. I understand the ignorance because I have lived in it, but I also understand how difficult it can be for many of them as well because of how they have been socialized. God has sent me to four predominantly white churches thus far, and in those churches, I was able to debunk many of their preconceived notions about black people. I've taught them that black people can enjoy rock and country music too. They have even asked numerous questions about my hair, and we have had educational moments regarding that. I have an interest in discussing the factors that do make us different such as our hair types. That is the beauty of diversity. It makes life interesting.

I worshipped in a multicultural church for the first time while attending seminary, and it changed my life. During my last year of seminary, my bishop asked me to apply for a church planting residency with Path One, a United Methodist organization that equips ministers to plant churches. He wanted to plant a multi-cultural church in North Mississippi and had selected three people to serve as co-pastors. I was asked to serve because I was African American. He had also appointed a Mexican pastor and a Caucasian pastor. I spent my last year of school working with Path One. For the residency, I was asked to serve in an incredibly diverse church in the Stone Mountain area, St. Timothy United Methodist. Over fifteen different nationalities worshipped there.

The membership included Caucasians who had been raised in the church, for the most part, several nations of Africa, the Caribbean, India, and Asia. I was sent there to observe and learn more about multiculturalism with an intent to apply some of what I had learned to our church in Mississippi. I never had so much fun in church. I loved how the various cultures were incorporated into our worship experience. We sang Christian songs in different languages, included diverse instrumentation, and prayed together in our native tongues. The plan for the new church plant did not fall through but my experience at St. Timothy was still such a blessing. The church fueled my passion for multiculturalism, and I will advocate for it wherever I go.

Congregational care is my most demanding role but certainly the most fulfilling role for me. I believe that God has given me the gift of listening. As pastors, we spend a lot of time trying to find the perfect words to say in every moment, but sometimes, God is calling us to offer our ears to others. Having the opportunity to visit our homebound and hospitalized parishioners to offer a loving presence is such an honor for me. Pastoral care is one of my strengths, and it is the main reason why I finally decided to pursue ministry. After college, I pursued an accounting job despite the fact I felt God calling me to be a minister. The day to day operations were incredibly boring for me. I loved numbers, but I did not feel fulfilled. Accounting did not inspire me to get out of bed in the morning. I found that the most rewarding part of my job was the conversation that I had with our clients. A few of our clients would come in, and they would simply want to talk. Several of them shared very personal issues with me, and I was amazed. Their willingness to be vulnerable with me was something that I realized I could not take lightly. All of a sudden,

I had these amazing opportunities to listen, share words of encouragement, and pray with our clients and that gave me a sense of purpose that I had never experienced in my life.

I also believe that God has gifted me with an ability to teach. I enjoy preaching, and I consider those opportunities are teaching moments. A sermon should always have a component of encouragement, but I also believe that the parishioners should leave the church with something that they did not have when they came in. I have also realized this passion for teaching in the classes that I am required to teach at my church. All of the pastors are required to teach two classes a year. I previously taught classes on race, Christian communal living, and prayer life. I've discovered that it is something that I enjoy and look forward to. My mom told me that when I was a child, I had a small dry erase board and I would come home and attempt to teach my younger brother everything that I learned at school. For the longest time, my family believed that I would become a schoolteacher. My brother and sister both became school teachers, and I believe that I became a teacher as well, but in a different capacity.

I am a very outspoken person. My family says that this is my only shortcoming, but it can be a gift if channeled properly. There are moments when pastors must speak up about issues that tend to make people uncomfortable. As a pastor, it is my responsibility to be candid if it is necessary. If the pastor cannot speak up, the person many people look to for wisdom and advice, who can? Pastors must offer care and encouragement, but we also have to be willing to hold our parishioners accountable when necessary. Ministry has helped me tame my outspokenness. I found

a way to use my outspokenness to my advantage, intentionally speaking when I hear God calling me to speak.

God has gifted me with patience and gentleness. This has aided me greatly in dealing with conflict. I have learned that this can be incredibly beneficial when encountering disgruntled church members. I have noticed that in moments of conflict when I have chosen to respond calmly, the other person calms down as well. We cannot escape conflict in the church and responding with love is not always easy; however, I believe that pastors should always seek to model better ways of handling conflict.

Synergy

For my project, I would like to explore segregation in the mainline church, specifically the United Methodist. I plan to go into depth on historical events that have influenced the makeup of the church today. As previously mentioned, several members of my congregation were not aware of the Methodist Church's racist past. I did not know anything about until I took a class in seminary taught by Bishop Woodie White, "Methodist Church and Race." After learning about this history, I wondered to myself why any black person would want to be Methodist. I think this history can shed light on the church's current status as a predominantly white denomination. I plan to explore this dynamic, along with other factors that influence church segregation including, but not limited to socialization and differences in culture, worship style, and world ideologies. This topic is important to me because I do not believe that our places of worship should be so divided. I understand that human beings tend to find ways to separate themselves,

and it is not limited to skin color, but if we say we are Christian and we believe the word of God as truth, we have to acknowledge the fact that God has called us to rise above our differences and love another. God made each of us unique for a reason and we, as the Body of Christ, can be strengthened by our differences. We each have something significant to offer. 1 Corinthians 12:12-26 says,

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

I believe that God is calling the church to embrace our differences because they all work uniquely together for God’s kingdom. If GUMC is committed to our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, we must allow God to lead us to unexpected people and places. If we seek to partner with God and truly be the church, we must model ourselves as much as we possibly can after Jesus, who spent much of his time embracing the other. Jesus gave a voice to people who did not have one and acknowledged the invisible, those in society who had been cast aside. Jesus was a

defender for all people. His interest was not simply in the people who looked like him, who had similar backgrounds as his. Jesus had a great love for humanity in all of its colors. The church should demonstrate that love as well. Perhaps Germantown does not face the issues that the city of Memphis faces. Maybe they cannot resolve the growing child poverty rate on their own. Perhaps they cannot stop the daily shootings and reverse the infant mortality rate in Memphis, but they can be a loving presence. For GUMC to begin offering themselves authentically to the Memphis communities that so desperately need to feel the love of Christ, they must see the value in people of color, recognizing that they too are their brothers and sisters, their equals, and whatever obstacles they face are their obstacles as well.

I confess that my passion for diversity will be the very thing that drives me in this project. Several years ago, when I interviewed for candidacy in the United Methodist Church, I was asked in what capacity did I see myself serving. I expressed a desire to serve a multicultural setting. A seasoned clergyperson explained that in Mississippi there were no multicultural churches and that I needed to settle for serving in either a white church or a black church. I responded by saying that I will never accept that and no matter where I go, diversity will always be a priority for me. He did not respond to my answer and quickly moved on to the next question. That was eight years ago, and nothing has changed for me. If I were currently serving in a black church, I believe I would be pursuing the same thing.

Having discussions on race can be incredibly difficult. I have found that it is challenging for many people of color because it is so personal and often painful. It is difficult expressing our experiences to a group of people who do not understand;

people who may or may not attempt to understand. I also think that these conversations can be just as challenging for white people. It is difficult acknowledging that your ethnic group has done a great deal to disenfranchise people of color. Many of them told me in a previous study on race how they have felt incredibly guilty and shameful even though they were not personally involved. I believe that my gifts of listening and pastoral care will be quite helpful in this regard. I think that I can create a nurturing space where everyone involved feels comfortable enough to share without judgment. I plan to lead the discussions in a non-abrasive way, offering care and compassion when needed. My gift of patience will allow me to be a mediator, doing my best to resolve any conflict that may arise in our time together.

If I channel my outspokenness appropriately, I will be able to say what is necessary even though it might make others uncomfortable. I think that for us to finally eradicate racism and uninformed assumptions about each other, we must feel comfortable enough to speak boldly. I will encourage all involved to speak up even if they do not agree with what is being said because if they do not, we will not have an opportunity to address their assumptions.

I plan to have discussions with members of my church as well as the Partners with Christ (PWC) group that includes a few of my parishioners as well. I really would like to include PWC because it is an ecumenical group with an even mix of black and white people. They all attend mainline churches, and I believe their perspectives would be relevant in my study on the mainline church as a whole. The PWC already made strides. They held a question and answer session with a professor of African American Studies at Memphis Theological Seminary. They also invited

white police officers to share their perspectives on the ongoing battle with police brutality.

As previously mentioned, my goal is to engage in conversations regarding race, which have been ongoing at my church, and later establish a plan for embracing diversity. I do not merely want to have more discussion on the issues and end with that. I desire to equip my congregation with the tools to set something practical in place. They have already discussed the possibility of having prayer walks, multicultural Bible studies, and even having a multicultural worship service on the National Day of Prayer with the other churches. Many have shared with me that they do not merely want to end with the conversations and it was incredibly refreshing and inspiring to hear.

Throughout my project, I hope to discover a process that works for my congregation. Many churches say that their churches are not doing enough to embrace diversity and I have found that many mainline seminaries do not adequately equip pastors to lead them in this effort. I hope that my learnings will be in-depth enough to be shared on district and conference levels and I would love to create a sensitivity training program for cross-racial appointments. In my interview with Martha Wagner, the first woman senior pastor of my church, she expressed the fact that sensitivity training for churches receiving women pastors for the first time was not offered and certainly did not exist at the time. I think that our churches would benefit from a program such as that if they are expecting to receive a pastor who is a woman or a person of color.

I seek to learn with my parishioners. Just because I have a passion for multiculturalism does not mean that I know everything about it. I am curious to see how my assumptions will be challenged throughout the process. When I arrived at GUMC, I have to admit that I made assumptions about them. I assumed that they were all conservative and unconcerned about the social and economic issues that people of color face. Several of them have proven me wrong. I have found that many of them are strongly abreast to the issues and are involved with other organizations in the Memphis area who seek to bring about change. When I began my first study on race, I went in on the first day expecting to have a debate with them about the existence of white privilege. Everyone in the room acknowledged that it exists and even addressed the challenges that our country faces because of it. One thing is for sure, I have a strong core to begin this process with, and I am incredibly grateful. I have a group of parishioners who do not need to be convinced about the issues at hand. Many of them truly understand, and they will be the ones who lead the congregation in this effort long after I have been appointed to another church. I am simply sowing seeds, helping them put the pieces together.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

In April of 2018, our church sang a cycle of Negro Spirituals in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s strides toward equality, economic justice, and racial reconciliation. The week before, the city of Memphis and the entire nation remembered Dr. King on the fiftieth anniversary of his assassination. We have all been processing the fact that fifty years ago, he was murdered in Memphis for causes that many have yet to overcome as Americans. Many of us have wrestled with these questions: Truthfully, how far have we come? Have we done our part as Jesus followers to cultivate peace in the world and in our communities? Would Dr. King be content with the advances that have been made in fifty years? If we are honest with ourselves, we must acknowledge the fact that though we may not be where we were fifty years ago, as far as justice, equality, and reconciliation are concerned, we are still struggling. Conflict and issues regarding race have evolved since then. Many have made significant efforts, but God is calling us to delve deeper.

It could be assumed, from the demographic of the congregation, that worshipping with people of color is not a priority as a whole though several members of my congregation have expressed a desire to become more diverse. As previously mentioned, a significant portion of the congregation simply do not know where to start. Paul's letter to the Corinthians was selected as the foundation for the

project because the Corinthians had similar struggles with diversity and inclusion and the points that he made in this letter align with the message to be shared with the congregation. The need for research is that GUMC, along with most U.S. mainline churches, remains ethnically homogenous despite the fact that the community and the greater Memphis area are becoming more diverse. This remains problematic for the church at large because racial segregation does not align with Jesus' message. The hypothesis that will guide the development of the project is the assumption that GUMC can only break racial barriers by intentionally fostering authentic relationships and by engaging in vital conversations on race with people of color. Developing a diverse worship experience may be helpful. This would be a great way to live out Paul's message to the Corinthians about the value every individual from within the faith community brings.

First Corinthians 12:12-26 places an emphasis on the church as the body of Christ that has many members. Paul expressed the fact that each member of the body has worth and should be valued equally. God has created humanity to be unique in their own way. Individuals see the world through different lenses, which means that there are moments when they disagree as a result. There are moments when individuals fail to understand each other and differences can indeed be barriers if allowed. Paul called the Corinthians and the contemporary church to move beyond the barriers to discover the value in their differences. Paul explained to the early church that God created diversity to enhance the community and not to cause division. It is imperative for the church to embrace diversity so that we can effectively utilize each other's gifts, in order for the

kingdom of God on earth to truly be realized. The church cannot authentically serve as the hands and feet of Christ if they are not delving into all of their gifts and resources.

Paul's intent for his letters to the Corinthians was not limited to the notion of embracing diversity. Paul wrote the early church to tackle a number of issues that they were facing. "Paul was a pastor who wrote letters to address the specific problems of his converts. Many of these problems were essentially social in nature, though they had theological roots or ethical implications."¹ They were learning how to live among each other as a faith community. They brought to the faith community their social, religious, and political views along with their prejudices.

Paul's Background

David Freedman explains that Paul, behind Jesus, was the second greatest influencer of the early church.² "He was foremost the apologist for the gentile mission, and the most eloquent defender of the centrality of Jewish traditions, scriptures, deity, and morality for his predominantly gentile churches."³ Thirteen of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament are attributed to Paul and this speaks volumes about his impact on ancient and modern Christianity.⁴ Paul was from Tarsus. He was a Roman citizen and a Pharisee. He received a Jewish education as a young boy but historians also believe he had a Greco-Roman education because he often cited Greek poets in his

¹ Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 6.

² David Freedman, *Eerdmans's Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 1016.

³ Freedman, *Eerdmans's Dictionary*, 1016.

⁴ Freedman, *Eerdmans's Dictionary*, 1016.

writings. Paul was probably descended from slaves. Either his parents or grandparents were freed slaves. His names, Saul and Paul both indicate a slave background.

“According to Roman practice in the first century, freed slaves were often distinguished by the name or nickname of the first person in their family to receive citizenship.”⁵

Typically, the nickname would become the family name.⁶ Biographer, Thomas Wayment explains that Saul was his birthname, but he was also known as Paul.⁷ Paul was possibly his Roman name. Wayment goes on to explain that “Paulus” was the family name that meant “short” or “stubby.” This indicates that his family name was indeed a nickname, which points to a family history of servitude. Paul’s possible family connection to slavery may shed some light on his concern for slaves. More than once, he lifts up the slave as an integral part of Christ’s church. His concern for the slave may have been more personal than biblical interpreters tend to realize.

Paul’s mission was to share Christ with the Jews and Gentiles, but he too had been converted. His conversion experience speaks to his ability to connect with other converts. He understood the challenges one may face when transitioning from one faith to another. Paul would have been considered a staunch Jew of his day. His theology was founded in the laws of the Torah, but would later finds roots in Jesus Christ, the fulfiller of the law. Historians dispute the notion that Paul was a great persecutor of Christians before his conversion. Paul mentions his persecution briefly and fails to detail what he had done. “Though haunted by the painful memory of his persecution of Christians, Paul

⁵ Thomas A. Wayment, *From Persecutor to Apostle: A Biography of Paul* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book Company, 2006), 167.

⁶ Wayment, *From Persecutor to Apostle*, 167.

⁷ Wayment, *From Persecutor to Apostle*, 167.

nowhere tells us where he waged the persecution, what the nature of the persecution was, who its victims were, or what inspired it.”⁸ It could be assumed with the bit of info Paul shares regarding this issue is that he obviously had a strong repugnance towards Christians; a feeling that he would later regret as he became one of the greatest champions of Christianity and the early church.

Corinthian City-State Background

The original city of Corinth (Greek Corinth) was founded in 5000 B.C.⁹ and was destroyed by the Romans in 146 B.C. The Corinthians Paul wrote to were residents of the new Corinth (Roman Corinth) rebuilt by the Romans in 44 B.C.¹⁰

Both the old and new cities of Corinth were located on the Isthmus of Corinth, which links mainland Greece with the Peloponnese. Corinth was surrounded by fertile plains with abundant natural springs, making it an ideal spot for settlement. Its geographical location made it an extremely attractive centre of trade, resulting in it becoming wealthy. Consequently, it was a city that was rarely out of the limelight in the ancient world.¹¹

The rebuilding of Corinth and return to prominence caused the residents to develop a sense of arrogance that evolved into something that became quite problematic over time. Status meant everything to the Corinthians. “The Corinthian people thus lived within an honor-shame cultural orientation where public recognition was often more important than facts and where the worst thing that could happen was for one’s reputation to be publicly

⁸ Freedman, *Eerdman’s Dictionary*, 1018.

⁹ Mark Cartwright, “Corinth,” *Ancient History Encyclopedia*, accessed April 15, 2018, <https://www.ancient.eu/corinth/>.

¹⁰ Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 6.

¹¹ Charles River, *Corinth: History and Legacy of the Ancient Greek City-State* (Digital publisher: Charles River Editors, 2017), 69.

tarnished.”¹² In this society, reputation determined one’s worth. This dynamic emerges in Paul’s letters. “Boasting, preening, false pride, and the like are topics that the apostle addresses repeatedly.”¹³ Paul tried to re-socialize the Corinthians which could be considered an integral part of religious conversion.¹⁴ “Even though they were converted to a new religious orientation, the Corinthian Christians brought with them into the ekklesia many of the primary social values gained over a life of living with a particular orientation. Paul attempts in his letters to further his converts’ resocialization by de-enculturating them from some of their former primary values.”¹⁵

Ethnic and Religious Background

After Corinth was rebuilt, many of the old religions re-emerged and immigrants introduced new religions as well.¹⁶ As 1 Corinthians suggests, Corinth became a city of “many Gods” (1 Cor. 8:5). The Greek gods Aphrodite, Poseidon, and Asclepius were three of many gods who were worshipped heavily in the Corinth.¹⁷ Mediterranean religions introduced included Christianity, Egyptian-based mystery religions, Judaism, and the little-known religion of the Phrygian.¹⁸

¹² Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 8.

¹³ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 8.

¹⁴ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 8.

¹⁵ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 8.

¹⁶ Freedman, *Eerdman’s Dictionary*, 280.

¹⁷ Freedman, *Eerdman’s Dictionary*, 280.

¹⁸ Freedman, *Eerdman’s Dictionary*, 281.

First Corinthians indicates that a significant number of Paul's converts were Gentiles and Jews. In his letters, he addressed religious traditions observed by both groups. During the period of Paul's ministry, about seven percent of the Corinthian population were Jewish and this community was also quite diverse.¹⁹ "They ranged from very sectarian and separatist to very Hellenized, and also from rather wealthy to slaves, though there appear to have been fewer Jewish slaves than slaves of any other group."²⁰ Jews in Corinth may have been a bit more progressive than other Jews of the time as women played an integral role in religious life. "The data about some of the mothers of the synagogue indicates that there were synagogue patronesses, but in a liberal environment like Corinth, other roles may have been possible as well."²¹

The Gentiles were identified as Greeks, those who observed pagan Gods, or non-Jews. "In biblical times, being a Gentile was not merely a matter of ethnicity; it was also a matter of political and territorial affiliations, and often religious faith."²² They accounted for the majority of the Corinthian church. The converted Gentiles dealt with much more criticism from Paul in his letters, as he himself had Jewish influences. "What contemporary readers, both Christian and Jewish, seldom notice is how much more sustained and savage the polemic of the New Testament is with respect to the Gentile world than with respect to Judaism."²³ Luke Timothy Johnson explains that the Jews developed a negative perception of the Gentiles long before the establishment of the

¹⁹ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 27.

²⁰ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 27.

²¹ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 28.

²² Freedman, *Eerdmans' Dictionary*, 494.

²³ Luke Timothy Johnson, *Among the Gentiles* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 61.

Corinthian church. The feeling was mutual as many of the Gentiles demonstrated sentiments of anti-Semitism.²⁴

Economic and Social Background

Corinth grew to become one of the most prominent city-states in the Greco-Roman world. When Paul arrived in Corinth during around 51 and 52 A.D., he met a city that was thriving economically. They had yet to reach their fullest potential, but they were certainly on their way. It was a major site for trade among Greece and other nations along the Mediterranean. They could attribute their economic prosperity to their location. They had control of two harbors that led to Asia and Italy.²⁵ “Corinth was thus the central crossroads for Mediterranean trade going east and west and to a lesser degree for goods shipped from Egypt or elsewhere in northern Africa to points north of Corinth.”²⁶ Biblical scholar and professor, Luke Timothy Johnson, believes that trade brought Paul to the city of Corinth as he manufactured leather tents.²⁷ Corinth’s continued economic prosperity provoked a sense of competitiveness among traders and manufacturers. The city’s culture of competitiveness would explain their interest in hosting Roman gladiatorial games. They were the first Greek city to do so.²⁸

²⁴ Johnson, *Among the Gentiles*, 62.

²⁵ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 9.

²⁶ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 9.

²⁷ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 11.

²⁸ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 11.

Paul was considered somewhat of an “average joe” of his time. He was well educated but because of his tent making, he was seen as an artisan.²⁹ This was not an honorable position in Corinthian society. “Well-to-do or aristocratic Romans, like Greeks, often had a low opinion of those who practiced a trade, and many of Paul’s problems in Corinth seem to have been caused by the wealthy and the social climbers among Corinthian Christians who were upset at him for not meeting their expectations for a great orator and teacher.”³⁰ It is plausible that Paul’s message regarding equality and diversity of gifts in 1 Corinthians the twelfth chapter may have been influenced by a sense of marginalization he, experienced himself, working as a tent maker in Corinth.

The social statuses of the early church varied though most were not tremendously wealthy. The early church benefitted greatly from the wealthy’s resources. The wealthy were able to host meetings in their homes.³¹ Also, “the leisure, administrative skills, education, and affluence of wealthy Christians gave them enormous advantages for becoming local, indigenous leaders in the congregation.”³² Witherington goes on to say that the early church greatly mirrored urban Corinthian society. Some were wealthy but some were also very poor, even slaves. As previously mentioned, status was of great concern in this society, but financial wealth was not the only factor that influenced one’s status. “The hierarchy of values in the Roman colonies also included family lineage, connections with Rome, and cultural sophistication.”³³ Another interesting societal

²⁹ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 20.

³⁰ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 20.

³¹ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 22.

³² Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 22.

³³ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 23.

dynamic was the concept of “bootstrap culture.” Corinthians were not bound to one status for their entire lives. They were empowered to rise above lower social statuses with hard work. Slaves could even buy their freedom. In fact, Corinth was comprised of many slaves who had been liberated.³⁴ “Both the veterans and the freedmen gained status not only by lineage or sophistication, but by mere accumulation of wealth and the power that it made possible.”³⁵ Some scholars contend that the Corinthians’ desire for status attracted many of them to the Christian religion.³⁶ It was new and identified as a means to stand out apart from the larger society.

The Corinthian church was diverse socioeconomically, ethnically, and religiously. The early church included aristocrats, artisans, slaves, former slaves, Jews, Gentiles, men, women, the educated, and non-educated. They came from very different backgrounds and had difficulty understanding one another. Panayotis Coutsoumpos explains, “they realized that as far as God was concerned, such differences were not important, but in practice their mutual acceptance had to be learned the hard way.”³⁷ As status held great weight in this society, along with a culture of competitiveness, they tended to size each other up, deciding for themselves who was worth more, who was more “Christian.” Their differences caused great conflict though this is not unusual considering the circumstances. “Social tensions are inherent in any religious group that is missionary in

³⁴ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 20.

³⁵ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 24.

³⁶ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 24.

³⁷ Panayotis Coutsoumpos, *Paul, Corinth, and the Roman Empire* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2015), 115.

character and seeks to construct strong boundaries between the believer and the world.”³⁸

Witherington explains that these tendencies can influence one of two dynamics, that is, of inclusiveness or exclusiveness.³⁹ Paul attempted to make a theological case for the former in his letters.

Literary Background

It is plausible that first Corinthians was written in either A.D. 53 or 54 while Paul was on a missionary tour. Around that time, he had traveled to Jerusalem and Asia Minor.⁴⁰ First Corinthians the sixteenth chapter indicates that Paul was writing from Ephesus at that time. He spent about eighteen months establishing the church then he served as the church’s apostolic leader from other locations.⁴¹ Paul maintained contact with the church by writing letters. Within the letters, Paul addresses their questions and concerns that revolved around Christian communal living, practices, and theology as the church moved through different stages of development.⁴² The conflict that arose from within the church did not simply evolve around their differences. The early church had issues with Paul as well. He led the church for a total of seven years, but spent most of that time away. The church dealt with transitions in leadership and many were also influenced by emerging religious leaders. These factors caused the church to begin

³⁸ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 29.

³⁹ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 29.

⁴⁰ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 73.

⁴¹ Carl R. Holladay, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament: Interpreting the Message and Meaning of Christ* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005), 304.

⁴² Holladay, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament*, 303.

questioning the authenticity and legitimacy of Paul's leadership and message. So not only is Paul attempting to keep the church together for Christ's sake but he is also trying to verify his true intentions and loyalty to the early Christians.

"When we read these letters, we are joining a conversation between Paul and Corinth that had already gone on for a quite a while, and the letters allow us to overhear a conversation that continued for several years."⁴³ Paul utilized the letters as alternatives for oral communication to read aloud in congregational gatherings.⁴⁴ "Paul wrote much of his writings with the intention that they would have a certain effect on the listening ear. The tendency to treat these documents simply as texts overlooks an important dimension of their intended function."⁴⁵ He wrote in way, so as to give the effect that he was speaking to them face to face. Paul used forms of ancient-Greek letter writing and dictated most of his letters to scribes.⁴⁶ The letters are dialogical in nature, which suggests the fact that Paul expected a response from his parishioners.⁴⁷ As mentioned previously, the letters represented an ongoing conversation between Paul and the church. He speaks with great authority in his letter, but he also invites the listener to respond.

The setting of first Corinthians points to a period when Paul, having not seen the church in a while, is attempting to layout a Christian framework. He attempts to build a church while resolving conflict all at the same time.⁴⁸ Paul used forms of Greco-Roman

⁴³ Holladay, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament*, 304.

⁴⁴ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 35.

⁴⁵ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 35.

⁴⁶ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 37.

⁴⁷ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 38.

⁴⁸ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 73.

rhetoric to get his points across. This rhetoric can be defined as forms of oral speech that arouse the emotions of the listener.⁴⁹

The three primary species of rhetoric - forensic, which was concerned with accusations and defense and thus focused on the past, deliberative, the true art of persuasion or dissuasion, which was future oriented, and epideictic, which was concerned with giving praise or blame in order to encourage agreement with or rejection of some value and was usually focused on the present. One could mix these types of rhetoric in a speech in order to convey a point.⁵⁰

Paul's use of rhetoric was mostly deliberative in nature. He presented a persuasive tone in his writing, rather than an authoritative one. "Rhetoric gave Paul a means to relate to and impress his Corinthian audience. Even those with little education had heard speeches that followed the conventions of rhetoric and were able to appreciate much of Paul's artistry."⁵¹ He wanted the Corinthians to understand how valuable and transformative a life with Christ could truly be. He did not use scare tactics to get his point across. He simply sought to share good news that he believed with his every being. Paul's intent should not be reduced to "winning" souls for Christ. He wanted the people to be moved towards a new way of being, a Christian way of being that would enrich their lives greatly. Paul writes to explain how beneficial being a part of a faith community can truly be, how love must govern everything, and how freedom and wisdom can be found in Christ.⁵²

In 1 Corinthians 12:2-126, the passage selection falls within the probatio portion of the Paul's letter to the Corinthians. "The probatio was the heart of a rhetorical speech

⁴⁹ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 43.

⁵⁰ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 43.

⁵¹ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 45.

⁵² Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 75.

or letter and included principal arguments used to persuade the audience.”⁵³ This section begins in 1:18 and ends in 16:12. Witherington outlines this portion of the letter as follows:⁵⁴

- a. Divisions of leaders and wisdom (1:18-4:21)
- b. Sexual immorality and lawsuits (5-6)
- c. Marriage and singleness (7)
- d. Idol food and eating in idol temples (8-11:1)
- e. Head coverings in worship (11:1-16)
- f. Abuses of the Lord’s supper (11:17-34)
- g. Spiritual gifts in Christ’s body (12-14)
- h. The future and the form of resurrection (15)
- i. The collection and other ministries for Corinth (16:1-12)⁵⁵

The passage chosen falls within the scope of Paul’s argument regarding spiritual gifts in Christ’s body, chapters twelve through fourteen.

The New Revised Standard translation was chosen because of a personal preference regarding language usage. This version identifies the body as “one” with “many members” which relays the importance of unity and intimacy within the faith community. What is unique about this passage is Paul’s usage of the human anatomy. The body of Christ needs every member of the body to function as the human body needs the same. Each metaphor references the human senses; the hands and feet for touching,

⁵³ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 76.

⁵⁴ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 76.

⁵⁵ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 76.

the eye for seeing, the ear for hearing, and the nose for smelling. Realistically, the body can function without a limb or a human sense but Paul is simply attempting to suggest that each of these things make the body complete and when all of the senses are present, the body can thrive fully.

One Body with Many Members

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it (1 Cor. 12:12-26).

The key words of this passage are body, members, spirit, to drink, honor, care, suffer, and rejoice. Each of these key words are relevant and will be explained below as it relates to the research topic. *Sōma* is the Greek word for the body and is used in this passage to identify a small or large group of men and women united closely by spiritual, social, or family relation. It is used in the New Testament most often in regards to Christ’s body.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Blue Letter Bible, “Concordance,” accessed March 20, 2018, https://www.blueletterbible.org/rsv/1co/12/12/s_1074026.

Melos is the Greek word for members and refers to parts of the human body. In this case, the term is used to identify those who have been chosen to be a part of the community of Christ. That bond is compared to the bond each limb has to the body as a whole.⁵⁷

Pneuma is the Greek word for the Spirit and is often used to refer to the Spirit of the living God, Christ's spirit breathed upon the church on Pentecost.⁵⁸ The Greek transliteration, "potizō," is used in reference to watering, nurturing, and also as a metaphor for infiltrating one's mind. The phrase "made to drink" could be a reference to a watering of the spirit or a reference to the Eucharist (drinking of Christ's blood).⁵⁹

"Timē" is the Greek term for honor and is used in reference to the importance of valuing each member of the faith community as well as their gifts.⁶⁰ "Merimnaō" is Greek for care and is defined by one's ability to take thought or to consider the well-being of others. For Paul, members of the faith community must have deep concern, consideration, and compassion for each other.⁶¹

"Sympaschō" is Greek for suffering and is used in reference to pain that might be experienced jointly. In this passage it may be utilized to stress the importance of

⁵⁷ Blue Letter Bible, "Concordance," accessed March 20, 2018, https://www.blueletterbible.org/rsv/1co/12/12/s_1074026.

⁵⁸ Blue Letter Bible, "Concordance," accessed March 20, 2018, https://www.blueletterbible.org/rsv/1co/12/12/s_1074026.

⁵⁹ Blue Letter Bible, "Concordance," accessed March 20, 2018, https://www.blueletterbible.org/rsv/1co/12/12/s_1074026.

⁶⁰ Blue Letter Bible, "Concordance," accessed March 20, 2018, https://www.blueletterbible.org/rsv/1co/12/12/s_1074026.

⁶¹ Blue Letter Bible, "Concordance," accessed March 20, 2018, https://www.blueletterbible.org/rsv/1co/12/12/s_1074026.

sympathizing with others from within the faith community.⁶² The Greek word for rejoice is “sygchairō.” The term is utilized to stress the importance of taking part in the joy of others, having a sincere desire to be congratulative when necessary.⁶³

Theology and Message

Yung Suk Kim contends that the entire letter of first Corinthians addresses what he calls the Christic body in Corinth and he subdivides the letter into three theological themes. He identifies these themes as “body figures.”⁶⁴ The key themes are the cross (1:18-4:21; 5:1-11:34), the community (12:1-15:11), and transformation (15:12-58).⁶⁵ “The image of the crucified body of Christ provides a symbolic identification with the liminal experience of the marginalized and it deconstructs human power, wisdom, charismatic gifts, self-seeking glory, and dominating unity.”⁶⁶ He explains that the cross reveals God’s power to the suffering and those cast aside by society.⁶⁷ The Corinthian body as the “body of Christ” represents a metaphor for living like Christ in community.⁶⁸ “Paul envisions a community of Christic embodiment, which requires believers (members of the community) to place their members, their capabilities, and their

⁶² Blue Letter Bible, “Concordance,” accessed March 20, 2018, https://www.blueletterbible.org/rsv/1co/12/12/s_1074026.

⁶³ Blue Letter Bible, “Concordance,” accessed March 20, 2018, https://www.blueletterbible.org/rsv/1co/12/12/s_1074026.

⁶⁴ Yung Suk Kim, *Christ’s Body in Corinth: The Politics of a Metaphor* (Minneapolis, MN: First Fortress Press, 2014), 80.

⁶⁵ Kim, *Christ’s Body in Corinth*, 80.

⁶⁶ Kim, *Christ’s Body in Corinth*, 81.

⁶⁷ Kim, *Christ’s Body in Corinth*, 81.

⁶⁸ Kim, *Christ’s Body in Corinth*, 84.

potential, and their active commitment at the service of ongoing community life.”⁶⁹ As the embodiment of Christ, the body is called to become a beloved community, lifting each other up as they climb. Finally, Kim asserts that the body of Christ is transformed by the resurrection power of Christ.

Those who affirm the resurrection of the dead through a living out of dying- that is, through self-emptying and other affirming life- are putting on immortal and imperishable bodies. Even here, the body imagery of death and resurrection suggests a message of protest against hegemonic attitudes and a call for the manifestation of God in the social body, the community.⁷⁰

Witherington explains Pauls’ usage of the body imagery. Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa, a Roman statesman, may have influenced Paul’s usage of this imagery but he utilizes it quite differently. Agrippa used the image of the body in an effort to promote the concept of factionalism in Rome.⁷¹ “Agrippa draws an analogy between the state and the human body in which the body’s members or parts present the quarreling parties or factions in the state.”⁷² Agrippa used the analogy to end tensions between the plebeians and the patricians in hopes that the plebeians would finally comply with the patricians.⁷³ “This deliberative argument against sedition speaks of a revolt of the hands, mouth, and feet against the stomach, which weakens the whole body.”⁷⁴ Paul’s usage of the body metaphor opposes this point of view. “He urges the strong (probably the well-to-do) to

⁶⁹ Kim, *Christ’s Body in Corinth*, 85.

⁷⁰ Kim, *Christ’s Body in Corinth*, 93.

⁷¹ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 253.

⁷² Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 254.

⁷³ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 254.

⁷⁴ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 254.

give more honor and respect to the weak and so cease their factious behavior.”⁷⁵ Paul stressed the body and its behaviors to such a degree because he believed that what one does with his or her body has “ecclesiological and soteriological implications.”⁷⁶ The Corinthians were learning how to become the ekklesia and their actions would dictate the church’s future.

Charles Campbell describes Paul’s indication of Christ and the church as a united body as “startling” and extraordinary.”⁷⁷ “Whether Paul is assuming some kind of mystical union between Christ and the church or speaking in a metaphorical way, he proclaims the essential identification of Christ and the church through the spirit.”⁷⁸ He explains that this union brings forth the continuation of Christ’s work in the world. “The work of the spirit is the work of Christ and the community formed by that spirit is the body of Christ.”⁷⁹ Paul stresses to the Corinthian people that they are not simply followers of Christ, but are in Christ, His vessels, united for a purpose.

First Corinthians 12:13 emphasizes the importance of baptism as the means to unification by the spirit. All are incorporated into the body of Christ through baptism. Baptism brings forth a new identity for the believer. Campbell states that the concept of baptismal identity is a critical theological component of first Corinthians.⁸⁰ Paul’s

⁷⁵ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 254.

⁷⁶ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 255.

⁷⁷ Charles Campbell, *First Corinthians: Belief Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 202.

⁷⁸ Campbell, *First Corinthians*, 203.

⁷⁹ Campbell, *First Corinthians*, 203

⁸⁰ Campbell, *First Corinthians*, 203.

position on baptism and its importance shifts in the letter. Apparently, there was conflict among the community regarding what approach should be taken towards baptism.

Initially, Paul urged the Corinthians to shift their gaze upon the Cross, rather than on baptism. He later retracts his position and repurposes the concept of baptism as a uniting concept.

Everyone, Paul announces, has been baptized into the one body of Christ through the one spirit. Paul here counters any divisions based on the persons who performed the baptisms. The one spirit is the primary actor in the baptism, no matter who might perform the ritual. Through the spirit, all other identity markers are relativized, whether racial and ethnic markers (Jews or Greeks) or social and economic markers (slaves or free).⁸¹

For Paul, the primary identity of the faith community is indeed baptism which, as Campbell would put it, “incorporates persons into the body as equal and interdependent members.”⁸² When it comes to issues regarding race in my church and in others across the nation, there tends to be a challenge in finding common ground. For Jesus followers, no matter what the background may be, baptism gives common ground. If humanity truly believe that their identity is rooted in Christ, they must be willing to identify with others who share the same fire for Christ. Baptism has uniting power and empowers the believer to see the other, not as a stranger, but as a brother, sister, mother, or father.

Paul later expresses the fact that regardless of the background, Jew or Greek, slave or free, God has invited humanity to drink of one spirit. Scholars have interpreted this in various ways. Fathers of the Reformation, including Luther and Calvin, argued

⁸¹ Campbell, *First Corinthians*, 204.

⁸² Campbell, *First Corinthians*, 204.

that this may be a metaphor for the Lord's Supper.⁸³ Others believe it references a second filling or second blessing after baptism.⁸⁴ It could also be a reference to baptism by the spirit versus baptism by water or simply a reference to Christian conversion.⁸⁵ The author of this research personally likes to think that this verse speaks to the Lord's Supper because both baptism and the Lord's Supper unite the faith community. Both sacraments speak to the covenant with God and with each other.

In verses fourteen through seventeen, the largest section of the chapter, Paul expresses the fact that the body consists of many members. He explains that every member of the body is necessary and has an integral role to play. This concept was introduced earlier in the chapter and he utilized these verses to prove his point. Here, Paul uses what Campbell describes as "playful theology" to communicate the body's interconnectedness. Paul uses humor to stress how silly it would be for any part of the body to believe it does not need the other parts.⁸⁶ "In order to affirm his central point that the Corinthians are the body of Christ, Paul develops comical imagery within his primary metaphor of the body. He depicts talking body parts."⁸⁷ These talking body parts reveal the absurdity of dismissing other parts because of their differences.⁸⁸ The body parts first speak for themselves, "If the foot would say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to

⁸³ Andrew Spurgeon, *India Commentary on the New Testament: 1 Corinthians* (Minneapolis, MN: First Fortress Press, 2011), 149.

⁸⁴ Spurgeon, *India Commentary*, 149.

⁸⁵ Spurgeon, *India Commentary*, 149.

⁸⁶ Campbell, *First Corinthians*, 206.

⁸⁷ Campbell, *First Corinthians*, 206.

⁸⁸ Campbell, *First Corinthians*, 206.

the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body” (1 Cor. 12:15). Paul later poses a series of rhetorical questions, “inviting the Corinthians to envision the entire body as just one part: one giant eyeball or one enormous ear.”⁸⁹ The body parts then begin to talk to each other. “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need for you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need for you,’” (1 Cor. 12:21). Paul’s use of the imagery in this regard addresses the early church’s conflict over spiritual gifts where some thought that their gifts were more vital than others. He goes on to stress the importance of valuing the members that are perceived to be the weakest. In the body, the parts that some consider the most fragile may indeed be more vital.⁹⁰ “In a healthy body, the strong and non-glamorous body parts (bones, ligaments, skin) cover and protect the ‘fragile but vital’ body parts (heart and lungs).”⁹¹

Paul states very clearly in the passage that it was God who arranged the members of the body. God has provided the gifts as well as the people needed for the body to thrive. It was important for the Corinthians to understand this. It is necessary for the body to value each member but the body must also recognize its need for God’s provisions as well. The body is nothing without its members and nothing without God’s power and presence. “He wants them to realize that the functions they have are unmerited gifts of God’s grace. There is thus no room for egotism or boasting.”⁹²

Paul also utilizes the body metaphor to counter individualism, stressing the beauty of diversity in the faith community. “Paul uses the body imagery to speak not of a natural

⁸⁹ Campbell, *First Corinthians*, 206.

⁹⁰ Spurgeon, *India Commentary*, 157.

⁹¹ Spurgeon, *India Commentary*, 157.

⁹² Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 255.

unity of all humans or of the republic, but of a community that is a supernaturally created body with diversity, the product of God's creative spirit."⁹³ The message here for Jesus followers is the fact that we are united through baptism but made stronger through our differences.

As previously mentioned, Paul addresses the diversity of spiritual gifts at the beginning of the chapter and speaks to their importance in this passage. He begins in verse four by saying, "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work" (1 Cor. 12:4-6). Diversity and oneness become foundational for spiritual gifts.⁹⁴ Paul expressed what could be considered a trinitarian view of these spiritual gifts. "There were diversities of gifts (charismata), diversities of ministries (diakonoi), and diversities of empowerments (energêma)."⁹⁵ All were gifted to the body by the spirit. Paul's words allude to the fact that diversity and oneness go hand in hand when it comes to the community of faith. We are tasked with different roles. We come with different gifts and insights but we must settle on the fact that we are the same when it comes to our identities in Christ. We should not pursue diversity for the sake of being diverse, to appear to be progressive or politically correct. Diversity brings forth a deep richness to the body but adjusting our perspectives and finding ways to see ourselves in those of the community who are different can be just as enriching.

⁹³ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 261.

⁹⁴ Spurgeon, *India Commentary*, 146.

⁹⁵ Spurgeon, *India Commentary*, 146.

It is important to keep in mind that one of the reasons why Paul wrote to the Corinthians was to address power conflicts and before the Corinthian people could become unified, they had to reconcile their issues. “The Corinthian context requires reconciliation, not first unity, made possible only through living like Christ.”⁹⁶ In attempting to live like Christ, the community must ask themselves, “What would Jesus do?” Living like Christ requires humility, forgiveness, solidarity, but first of all, love. In the final verses of the passage, Paul explains to the Corinthians the importance of living in love and solidarity with one another saying, “there is no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it” (1 Cor. 12: 25, 26). It is imperative for the faith community to become a caring community, having the best interest of everyone at heart. Whatever concerns one of us, must concern all of us. If one member is experiencing a trying circumstance, we stand with him or her for support. If one member is experiencing a season of great joy and success, we celebrate with that member.

Kim explains that Paul’s central theology and ethics lead to multiculturalism because his message regarding Christ embraces people of different ethnicities, social statuses, religions, and genders.⁹⁷ The message of Christ has two implications for multiculturalism. The Cross becomes of symbol of solidarity for the oppressed and suffering. It also represents humility and deconstructs self-seeking glory. Paul’s message to the Corinthians alludes to the fact that the only one who deserves utmost glory and

⁹⁶ Kim, *Christ’s Body in Corinth*, 68.

⁹⁷ Kim, *Christ’s Body in Corinth*, 100.

honor at the end of the day is our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. As one body, Christ is the head and calls us to partner with him in nurturing his kingdom here on earth. We have been tasked with different roles because God understands that in order for us to be fruitful as a community of faith, we must have the right people and an abundance of gifts and resources set in place.

Paul's vocation as a tentmaker provided opportunities to encounter a wide array of individuals. We also understand that Paul may have descended from former slaves, which could have led to a sensitivity or concern for those in his community who were still enslaved. There is no doubt that his story shaped his theology and his concern for every human being, despite what their background might have been. Paul's experiences and theology point to the importance of surrounding ourselves with different people. So much can be learned in diverse environments and the church is one of the best places to pursue diversity. As Jesus followers, we stress the importance of loving our neighbors, and so, the church must be a safe place where we can go to not only reconnect with God, but to delve deeper into the word, and pursue challenging conversations. The church is supposed to be a safe place where humanity challenges self to become the best versions of self, the place where one has the freedom to acknowledge shortcomings and the need for growth and understanding.

Paul explains to the early church that through baptism, humanity is united for a purpose, that is, to live and serve as the hands and feet of Christ. As one body, all have different gifts and responsibilities. Each task is valuable and necessary. Paul's message here is that, at the end of the day, humanity needs each other in order to thrive as a faith community; and they are better together. God calls the church to serve with humility,

recognizing the fact that God is the one who has given the church everything all the church has. This was a tough lesson for the Corinthians to learn as they lived in a culture driven by status.

Paul's message to the Corinthians is a message for everyone, especially the contemporary, American church. Like the Corinthians, contemporary Christians are trying to find the way, to understand where and how God is calling us to be the church; and like the Corinthians humans struggle with differences and fail to love their neighbors. Like the Corinthians, humans fail to recognize, at times, the gifts one may possess because one cannot get beyond his or her outward appearance. Campbell explains that the church has reached a point of no return and at this point in the life of the church, one cannot afford to be silent and tone deaf when it comes to social and even political issues. He also explains that the church may be losing its influence among demographic, cultural, and religious shifts. "Churches may now be able to relate better to that miniscule church in Corinth seeking to live out its life in a wildly diverse and cosmopolitan city. The comfortable old ecclesial patterns and assumptions are dying, while it's not clear what the new shape will be."⁹⁸

GUMC's efforts in remembering Dr. King by singing a cycle of Negro spirituals was a huge step for them and it certainly was received well by the congregation. One might leave that sort of worship experience wondering when will inclusion become a priority for white parishioners, if it is not on a day when Negro spirituals are sang of all things? Some members of GUMC and the Corinthians share a similar issue of lacking consideration for the other. Black people were not excluded from the experience but they

⁹⁸ Campbell, *First Corinthians*, 3.

were not considered in being a part of it either. Paul's message in this passage speaks to the importance of considering the other, seeing the other, identifying with the other, and finally inviting the other to take his or her place in the body of Christ where he or she belongs.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

In this chapter, the emergence of the black American Christianization beginning around the colonial era and ending around the Reconstruction era will be traced. The white Christian resistance in response to the rise of Christianity among free and enslaved black people will also be highlighted. White Christians mostly attempted to manipulate scripture and the message of Christ to maintain the status quo, but as biblical literacy and Christian piety evolved among black Americans, they began to develop their own opinion about scripture, and it placed different perspectives on the ways they perceived themselves and lived their lives as Jesus followers.

On April 17, 1960, the Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “It is appalling that the most segregated hour of Christian America is eleven o'clock on Sunday morning.” That was fifty-eight years ago, and despite the strides that have been made towards inclusion and equality since then, Dr. King’s words still hold true. Perhaps more than ever, our ethnically homogenous congregations express the need for more diversity, but few have been successful in making the transition from ethnically homogenous to multi-ethnic, which indeed is a challenging task. Issues of power are at the core of this challenge. Efrem Smith explains that even when the church attempts to have conversations about diversity or any church-related dynamic in general, those conversations are led by white male pastors. “If I were to ask the average evangelical to

name great historic leaders, more than likely Billy Graham would be mentioned before Martin Luther King Jr.”¹ He contends that our conversations on diversity and church planting tend to be exclusive. “The church planting movement is dominated by predominantly white organizations such as Vision 360, the Association of Related Churches, and the Exponential Conference.”² He expresses concern that concepts regarding the church are not legitimate unless white men are at the center of the conversation.³ This has always been an issue for the American church, and this dynamic will be detailed in this chapter. How far can we go in the church if our conversations that are considered progressive are not always approached in a progressive manner?

The wounds regarding racial division cut terribly deep in America and Christianity was at the center of it all. In order to truly understand why we are facing what we are facing in the church, we must retrace our Christian footsteps beginning in the New World. Retracing our steps enables us to realize the depth of this issue that intensified over the course of several centuries in this country. We have lived through only a few decades of desegregation and intentional strides for equality. That is just a blip in time when we consider how long slavery and segregation lasted in this country. From the very beginning of the American church, white Christians tried to maintain authority not simply over the church, but the Christian faith as well. Though white Christians in early America did not share the same views on social issues, they primarily made efforts

¹ Efrem Smith, *Post Black and White Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 117.

² Smith, *Post Black and White Church*, 117.

³ Smith, *Post Black and White Church*, 117.

to maintain control from the conversations regarding whether or not slaves should be baptized to the conversations regarding the ordination of black preachers as elders.

Paul Harvey explains that the early south was incredibly multicultural and it is surprising that this region of the country would eventually become the Bible belt. Various religions and practices coexisted initially such as Christianity, Islam, Native religions, and African religions.⁴ Colonization influenced the rise of Christianity as many of the early settlers sought to advance Protestantism in the New World.⁵ The slave trade began in 1619, and it is important to note that at least 360,000 Africans who were captured from that year up until 1808, had already been exposed to or identified with Christianity or Islam.⁶ Black exposure to Christianity predated slavery, but white Christians failed to acknowledge this at the time. Africans were perceived as “heathens” who could not have the capacity to identify with Christianity or any organized religion for that matter. This shared notion was an initial marking of racial prejudice in early American Christianity.

In the early modern world, religious divisions drawn by European colonists, between those of Christ and those in the heathen world, defined race. European or English meant Christian. African, by contrast, meant heathen, despite the fact that many Africans had been Christianized and that large portions of North Africa and several kingdoms in sub-Saharan Africa had fallen under the sway of Islam. In short, very early on, the categories of religion and race became intertwined in southern history, each helping to define the other. Religion created race and race thereafter shaped religion. Euro-Americans developed some of the meanings of race in the modern sense. They determined what constituted whiteness and blackness, categories that would long outlive slavery itself. Those categories, were, at least initially, fundamentally religious ones.⁷

⁴ Paul Harvey, *Christianity and Race in the American South* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 7.

⁵ Harvey, *Christianity and Race*, 11.

⁶ Harvey, *Christianity and Race*, 17.

⁷ Harvey, *Christianity and Race*, 19.

Many Europeans perceived Africans as irreligious while others saw their customs as “pagan” or “barbaric.”⁸ Heathenism and blackness were inextricably linked.⁹ “As one early commentator put it, Negroes were ‘a people of beastly living, without a God, law, religion, or commonwealth.’”¹⁰ Morgan Godwyn, a minister in seventeenth century Virginia, expressed that, “nothing is more barbarous and contrary to Christianity than their idolatrous dances and revels.”¹¹

The colonial era saw an influx in the conversion of African slaves. Very soon, colonizers would question whether or not this was a good idea. White colonists were explicitly concerned about baptizing their slaves and what ramifications that would have on their free labor. They questioned whether or not baptism and conversion would require freedom.¹² Part of the justification for African slavery was the notion that Africans were not truly human and baptism would affirm their humanity. Accepting their slaves’ humanity and seeing them as brothers and sisters in Christ, as scripture encourages, would contradict their justification for enslaving the Africans. To resolve the ambiguous status of converted black slaves, who perceived their baptism as a means towards emancipation, colonial laws were implemented.¹³ These laws, first implemented in Virginia and Maryland, explicitly dissociated baptism from freedom.¹⁴ “In 1664, the

⁸ Harvey, *Christianity and Race*, 20.

⁹ Harvey, *Christianity and Race*, 21.

¹⁰ Harvey, *Christianity and Race*, 21.

¹¹ Harvey, *Christianity and Race*, 21.

¹² Harvey, *Christianity and Race*, 20.

¹³ Harvey, *Christianity and Race*, 20.

¹⁴ Harvey, *Christianity and Race*, 20.

Maryland legislature worked out a law mandating that all slaves would serve for life, hoping that this would alleviate fears that slaves would feign Christianization to achieve freedom.”¹⁵ This marked a point in history when Christianity and slavery became, “theoretically compatible.”¹⁶ “In 1667, Virginians explained that the act of baptizing a slave would not alter the condition of the person as to his bondage or freedom.”¹⁷ These laws eased slave masters’ concerns and empowered them to continue “evangelizing” to their slaves. While laws indicated that baptism would not have any bearing on a person’s status as free or unfree, lawmakers ensured that these laws would not impact white Christians who had come to America as indentured servants. A Virginia law in 1705 implemented protections for white English servants that also included a prohibition of stripping these Christian servants naked and whipping them, something that was customary for African slaves.¹⁸ Harvey notes that these laws may have also been borne out of a response to black Christian slaves’ cries for freedom. White Christian servants and slaves from England understood themselves as free, as defined by the English.¹⁹ “They continued to insist that Christianity should eventuate in earthly freedom.”²⁰ They influenced the black slaves’ perception of Christianity as it related to their freedom.

Over time, the question regarding whether or not slaves should be converted became more of an issue as the African slave population grew and began to outnumber

¹⁵ Harvey, *Christianity and Race*, 20.

¹⁶ Harvey, *Christianity and Race*, 20.

¹⁷ Harvey, *Christianity and Race*, 20.

¹⁸ Harvey, *Christianity and Race*, 21.

¹⁹ Harvey, *Christianity and Race*, 21.

²⁰ Harvey, *Christianity and Race*, 21.

the colonists, which caused considerable conflict among the colonies. Some planters believed that Christianity was an exclusive white religion, while others thought that they were obligated to evangelize to their slaves. Others naturally feared that Christianity would inspire African slaves to revolt and their fear indeed came to fruition, many times. By the early 1700s, "Christianized slaves envisioned a religiously inspired revolution. They insisted that they possessed equal souls and equal rights. They spoke the language of power in courtrooms, in letters to imperial officials, and as a last resort, in rebellions."²¹

The black evangelical Awakening took place in the eighteenth century. This period coincided with the Great Awakening, a time marked by religious enthusiasm. Christian revivals spread throughout Great Britain and the colonies. American evangelicalism took flight as a result and would soon make way for the establishment of denominational churches. The Awakening resonated with black slaves because it was a movement marked by profound spiritual expression. This reminded them very much of the "African customs of bodily expressiveness in religious rituals."²² The movement also resonated with black slaves because revivalists and evangelicals shared a message that moved beyond racial barriers. The Great Awakening gave many black slaves a sense of identity and belonging that they had never experienced. As a pious desire for Christian knowledge grew among black people, evangelists took advantage of this appeal.²³ They saw this as an excellent opportunity to fulfill their mission of sharing Christ with all the

²¹ Harvey, *Christianity and Race*, 29.

²² Harvey, *Christianity and Race*, 42.

²³ Harvey, *Christianity and Race*, 44.

world. They were moved by the black awakening, but also disturbed by it simultaneously.²⁴

Again, the upspring of black Christianization in this period brought forth more white Christian suspicion and resistance.²⁵ “The Awakening reinforced the conviction among whites that spiritual freedom did not extend to temporal liberation and that religious expressiveness could be embraced but could not be repressed.”²⁶ Some Christian leaders believed that slaves had ulterior motives when converting to Christianity. There was a belief that slaves hoped to gain respect and less discipline from their masters by converting, in addition to their hope for freedom.²⁷

Though most slaves still had not been exposed to Christianity at this time, several began to establish churches. In 1773, what is understood to be the first black Baptist congregation in the south (Silver Bluff, South Carolina) was created by David George.²⁸ In the 1780’s, that church moved to Augusta and became Springfield Baptist Church.²⁹ Around 1788, Andrew Bryan, who had been ordained by Baptists, organized a nightly gathering in Savannah, TN.³⁰ This was alarming to the local whites who had him

²⁴ Harvey, *Christianity and Race*, 43.

²⁵ Harvey, *Christianity and Race*, 43.

²⁶ Harvey, *Christianity and Race*, 42.

²⁷ Harvey, *Christianity and Race*, 42.

²⁸ Harvey, *Christianity and Race*, 44.

²⁹ Harvey, *Christianity and Race*, 44.

³⁰ Harvey, *Christianity and Race*, 45.

viciously whipped.³¹ Bryan went on to establish several other churches in Georgia, and his original church predated the white Baptist churches in Georgia.³²

Slave rebellions and escapes became more common in the Antebellum Period. In 1831, Nat Turner led a revolt that killed nearly sixty whites. Eventually, he was caught and executed along with his accomplices and those accused to be his accomplices.

According to Thomas Gray's *Confessions*, Turner was a Baptist messianist who sensed he had been divinely chosen for some special purpose. He felt a connection with his fellow slaves produced not by the tricks of conjuring but instead by the 'communion of the spirit whose revelations he often communicated to them.' In 1828, the Spirit told him 'that the serpent was loosened, and Christ had laid down the yoke he had borne for the sins of men, and that he should take it on a fight against the serpent.'³³

Turner's words demonstrate how impactful Christianity was in shifting the slaves' perceptions of their bondage. The message of Christ was interpreted by many as a message of freedom, and as black piety sprouted over the years, their desire to be free intensified as well. Nat Turner's story also demonstrates how restless many of the slaves had become in their pursuit of freedom.

Methodism

Methodism began in America initially as an interracial movement during the Colonial Era, but they were never immune to racism. "The racial prejudices of colonial American society deeply influenced early American Methodists even as they proclaimed

³¹ Harvey, *Christianity and Race*, 45.

³² Harvey, *Christianity and Race*, 45.

³³ Harvey, *Christianity and Race*, 67.

the gospel open to all.”³⁴ For a time, they were still able to gather together in worship. By 1774, the Methodists had gained over 500 free African Americans.³⁵ They made up at least twenty-five percent of the movement.³⁶ There certainly were more, but the slaves were omitted from that figure. The Methodist Movement did exceptionally well after the American Revolution when more slaves gained their freedom. African Americans held a solid twenty percent presence from the late eighteenth century well into the nineteenth centuries.³⁷ As mentioned before, revivals appealed to black people, but also to the whites. The Awakening impacted everyone equally. Many initially understood Methodism as a movement that opened the door to all people despite, gender, ethnicity, or class. “This new status produced a condition of liminality, a threshold of new experience that Methodists shared with one another.”³⁸ Under Methodism, all Christians became brothers and sisters despite their background. They became one body, as Paul would suggest in first Corinthians. Colonial America was driven by status, as was Corinth, and Methodism broke away from that mold initially. “The Methodist message was an egalitarian one, although Methodists were not completely able to live out this egalitarian ideology.”³⁹ Methodism was deemed radical, and many were disconcerted by the message, especially in the south.⁴⁰

³⁴ Peter C. Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 9.

³⁵ Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 9.

³⁶ Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 9.

³⁷ Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 9.

³⁸ Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 10.

³⁹ Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 10.

⁴⁰ Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 10.

Black people were not only drawn to the openness of Methodism but also to its opposition to slavery. The founder of the Methodist movement, John Wesley, spoke very candidly about his concerns for slavery and refused to consume anything produced out of slave labor. “Wesley wrote his anti-slavery tract in 1774 in which he asserted that, ‘Liberty is the right of every human creature, as soon as he breathes the vital air and no human law can deprive him of that right.’”⁴¹ In 1780, at a meeting in Baltimore, Methodist leaders agreed that slavery was, “contrary to the laws of God, man, and nature, and hurtful to society, contrary to the dictates of conscience and pure religion.”⁴² About five years later, the first *Discipline* condemned slavery and prohibited members from owning slaves. If members had acquired slaves, they were given two years to free them.⁴³

Black people were also drawn to the Methodist worship experience which was rooted in, “preaching, praise, and hymn singing.” The worship experience was upbeat, had feeling, and it offered black people biblical knowledge that had previously been denied to them. They were encouraged to delve deeper in their faith. Conversion was no longer the end all for black Christians. They desired to know and experience God on a deeper, emotional level expressed inwardly and outwardly.⁴⁴

In the 1830s, race began to cause divisions in the Methodist Episcopal church in addition to divisions over church polity.⁴⁵ The church’s retreat from their antislavery position marked the beginning of a social shift that would impact the church for decades.

⁴¹ Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 11.

⁴² Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 11.

⁴³ Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 11.

⁴⁴ Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 12.

⁴⁵ Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 13.

Just six months after the first *Discipline* was written in 1785, they suspended their rules against slavery.⁴⁶ The divisions on slavery led to the development of two separate issues of the *Discipline*, whereas the southern version failed to mention slavery entirely.⁴⁷ Over time, Methodists' values were compromised as they sought to gain more membership and establish more congregations in the south.⁴⁸ Their growing leniency impacted the church's relationship with its black members. Classes had become segregated, and conflicts arose between black and white members over equality.⁴⁹ "At St. George Methodist Church in 1792, angry ushers who wanted African Americans to pray last dragged leaders Richard Allen and Absalom Jones to their feet while at the altar."⁵⁰ They were also denied communion until all of the white members had received the sacrament. The most significant issue, however, for black Methodists concerned their rights to be leaders in the church. Several black ministers, including Richard Allen, were ordained only as deacons. This was problematic because deacons were not permitted to administer the sacraments of baptism and communion, nor were they allowed to officiate at weddings.⁵¹

Richard Allen eventually left St. George, established the Free African Society with Absalom Jones, and later established Bethel Methodist Church.⁵² White paternalism

⁴⁶ Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 13.

⁴⁷ Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 13.

⁴⁸ Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 13.

⁴⁹ Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 14.

⁵⁰ Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 14.

⁵¹ Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 14.

⁵² Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 14.

plagued the black church, including Allen's. White presiding elders were required for all black congregations because black ministers were not permitted to be ordained as elders.⁵³ At one point, St. George, who had ties to New Bethel, attempted to appoint a new preacher and their presiding elder, James Smith, was contested in court on this issue.⁵⁴ The court ruled in Allen's favor and ordered that St. George no longer had any authority over Bethel.⁵⁵ "This was a blow to white paternal control and monopoly of church power as Bethel had grown to become one of the largest Methodist congregations in America."⁵⁶ Murray contends that the Methodist church could have avoided the major schism between black and white members if they had been willing to simply ordain their ministers as elders and accept them as members of annual conferences.⁵⁷ Despite their efforts, the Methodists could not escape the social norms of America. "White American society assumed its supremacy over African Americans, slave or free, and the liminal enthusiasm of Methodists became less common and racial prejudice more prevalent."⁵⁸

The schism between black and white Methodists did not end the tensions regarding race. Slavery remained an issue for the church. The General Conference of 1844 supported the Baltimore Conference's decision to deny ordination for a candidate who owned a slave, but the breaking point concerned the status of Bishop James O.

⁵³ Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 15.

⁵⁴ Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 15.

⁵⁵ Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 15.

⁵⁶ Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 15.

⁵⁷ Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 15.

⁵⁸ Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 15.

Andrew, who inherited a slave through his wife.⁵⁹ They asked the bishop to step down, and the southern Methodists were infuriated by this. “Southern Methodists found this unacceptable, and they announced their intent to form a new church, one cleansed of antislavery sentiment.”⁶⁰ After the north and the south split, they both maintained African American membership but continued to “supervise” their congregations. Even after black congregations were formed, white Christians did their best to exercise their control. It is interesting to note that white Christians felt the need to dictate to black Christians how they should be doing church after they virtually drove them out of their churches. Though black Christians found more autonomy in forming their churches, inequality was still an issue in their places of worship. It should also be noted that both the northern and southern churches proceeded to supervise the black congregations. This was not a southern dynamic.

The southern Methodist church sought to alter the message of Christianity to enforce their pro-slavery agenda.

Many southern slaveholders allowed the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, to organize congregations among their slaves so that their slaves might internalize values of loyalty and honesty. Masters saw Christianity as a means of extending their authority and making their slaves more satisfied. Most slave owners very much wanted to believe in their benevolence, and what could be more benevolent than bringing salvation to their slaves?⁶¹

Southern Christians used scripture, including passages from Genesis, Colossians, and Ephesians to encourage compliance on behalf of their slaves.

Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; not with eye-

⁵⁹ Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 17.

⁶⁰ Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 17.

⁶¹ Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 17.

service, as men-pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free (Eph. 6:5-7).

Finally, in 1864, the northern church approved the ordination of African American ministers as elders.⁶² This was a victory for black Methodists, but they still faced a long journey ahead. After the Civil War, black Methodists continued to fight tooth and nail to gain equality by pushing for the election of black bishops. The General Conference stated that black ministers would be eligible to be elected to the episcopacy, but black bishops were never elected before 1920.⁶³ “19th-century efforts to elect an African American bishop reached their zenith in 1896, when Dr. John Wesley Bowen, led all voting on the first ballot for the episcopacy.”⁶⁴ Despite this fact, he was not elected, and black Methodists in the northern church were disappointed about this.⁶⁵

Black Christianity During Reconstruction Period

The Reconstruction was a progressive period for black Americans. “For black Americans, Reconstruction presented the prospect of triumph over oppression and the ability to win rights to land and the ballot box.”⁶⁶ Black people pursued entrepreneurship and politics. This was also a significant time in the growth of the black church as they left white churches in droves. The black church became the cornerstone of the black

⁶² Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 18.

⁶³ Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 22.

⁶⁴ Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 23.

⁶⁵ Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 23.

⁶⁶ Paul Harvey, *Bounds of Their Habitation* (London, UK: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), 101.

community. It became the meeting place, not simply for Sunday morning worship, but also for social and political gatherings. Clergy assumed a role as political activists, advocating for the welfare of black people.⁶⁷ “The central role of black churches during Reconstruction showed how power of black religious practices developed under slavery and in free black communities could become visible, public, and political.”⁶⁸ In response to growing black activism and empowerment, Klu Klux Klan terrorism became more widespread in the south. Black churches and ministers became key targets.⁶⁹ This is striking because the Klan claims to be a Christian organization. Paul Harvey notes the murder of a Methodist minister by the name of Lewis Thompson in June 1871.

Lewis had gone to preach in Union County, South Carolina. While there, he had been handed a paper with a coffin drawn on it and the notion, “Here is the coffin that they have marked out for me if I preach in Goshen Hill township.” Thompson defied the threat and preached that night, but then fled the area. Later, in June, he returned to preach again. Klansmen then dragged him from his house, stabbed and castrated him, and dumped his body in the river. Locals feared giving him a burial, as Klansmen threatened anyone who helped his family.⁷⁰

Other Denominational Dimensions

Unfortunately, black Christians faced inequality in virtually every denomination in America. While the Methodists struggled to resolve racial prejudices regarding full participation, other denominations dealt with different racial issues. Each denomination desired black membership, but they were not prepared to embrace them into their congregations as equals. For example, the Catholic church decided to pursue more

⁶⁷ Harvey, *Bounds of Their Habitation*, 102.

⁶⁸ Harvey, *Bounds of Their Habitation*, 102.

⁶⁹ Harvey, *Bounds of Their Habitation*, 102.

⁷⁰ Harvey, *Bounds of Their Habitation*, 103.

African Americans, but they also felt the need to establish separate parishes for them.⁷¹

This was not customary for the Catholic church. “Separate parishes in the same locale ran counter to the tradition of parish determined solely by geography.”⁷² From ground zero, they established a structure rooted in prejudice. The Protestant Episcopal Church failed to have any involvement with civil rights in the late nineteenth century, and they received criticism for this.⁷³ “Writing in 1903, W. E. B. DuBois judged that the Episcopal church had probably done less for black people than any other aggregation of Christians,” but to be fair, there were not many black Episcopalians, as most Black Christians were Baptist or Methodist.⁷⁴ They did organize a freedman’s commission in 1865 it was hardly auspicious.⁷⁵

The southern branch of the Presbyterian Church (PCUS) struggled with race relations as well. They drove away many of their black parishioners after the Civil War. Once they gained their freedom in 1865, the southern Presbyterian church expressed the fact that, “freedom made African Americans no less in need of salvation but that they should expect to take a subordinate role when worshipping with white southerners.”⁷⁶ As in the Methodist church, they refused to ordain their black ministers and maintained a supervisory role in black churches.

⁷¹ Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 23.

⁷² Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 23.

⁷³ Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 24.

⁷⁴ Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 24.

⁷⁵ Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 24.

⁷⁶ Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 25.

The northern Presbyterian church (PCUSA) took a mildly different approach. They did ordain a few black ministers. They also rejected a proposal for segregated presbyteries and synods, but later agreed to do some to appease the southern Cumberland Presbyterian Church as they merged.⁷⁷ African American Presbyterians protested this to no avail as the northern church changed its constitution to allow this. It is disappointing to realize how challenging it was for denominations to stand their ground when it came to racial equality. Some denominations attempted to do the right thing but felt tremendous pressure to appease their majority white memberships to survive.

African American Methodists, Catholics, Episcopalians, and Presbyterians sought unsuccessfully to worship God as full members of their churches. They protested being relegated to the gallery, denied ordination, or treated as children under the tutelage of their white counterparts. However, racial prejudice remained stronger than Christian brotherhood.⁷⁸

Conclusion

The history of race and its ties to American Christianity is vital for the project because it uncovers the root of the issues regarding race that one faces in the churches today. Our Christian American history explains why humanity struggle when it comes to racial reconciliation. For centuries, black people in this country have given their every being in chasing justice and equality, and though there were white societies and movements that worked tirelessly to help black people gain their rights, the white mainline churches were mostly at the forefront of black oppression in and out of the church. The intentional disenfranchisement of black people in this country is woven in

⁷⁷ Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 26.

⁷⁸ Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 26.

the fabric of the American story. This disenfranchisement began in the New World and has evolved since then.

This narrative regarding black Christianization and white Christian resistance should be an integral part of the project because the congregation needs to be made aware of this history. The mainline church is mainly segregated today, and this dynamic is a direct result of the accounts shared in this chapter. What is so striking about this is the fact that this history is not common knowledge. Many American Christians, both black and white, have never been exposed to this information and it is dire to lift this up with parishioners. Several members of the congregation expressed the fact that they were not aware of the Methodist church's racist past. The author of this work knew nothing about this history until participating in Bishop Woodie White's class on Methodism and race at Candler School of Theology. It is important to understand the Christian American story to know how deep the wounds truly are to cultivate authentic healing. We cannot truly foster an authentic beloved community, without knowing the depth of the issues facing the churches and communities.

This history should be taken into consideration when pursuing multiculturalism. The concept of the diverse church is incredibly appealing. Church diversity is certainly a passion, but the history of black struggles toward Christianization forces the author to question whether or not diversity for black people is what is best. Black Americans have made tremendous strides in achieving rights within the church and in American society and the black church today serves to preserve the history and traditions. This dynamic is crucial for the project because it puts things into perspective regarding how the group should approach developing the diverse worship experience. As the diverse worship

experience is planned, it is developed thoroughly to ensure that black voices and traditions are visible and valued as much as the other cultures that we seek to incorporate. Further, every individual should be given equal opportunity to contribute. This topic was challenging to research because it is obviously very personal, but it is important to recall this history to inform modern-day Christians of our past to prevent history to prevent it from repeating itself.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Pondering over the dissension the nation continues to face regarding race relations, one must come to grips with the mainline church's deep entanglement with that dissension. For the historical chapter, the church's racist footsteps were traced throughout the entire American timeline. The purpose was to bring light to the cause of the current failures regarding race relations in the church. The human race is primarily separated today because of past failures. The wounds cut so profoundly to the point where many black and white Christians do not have much desire worshipping among each other. Perhaps the separation is not as intentional as it had been in the past. The current make-up of our churches would suggest that we have come to the point of indifference when it comes to worshipping/breaking bread with those who do not look alike. The conflict for many has led to apathy, where humanity has gone beyond denying the other and simply failing to acknowledge the other's existence. That was the observation back in the Spring when GUMC sang a cycle of Negro Spirituals without thinking twice about including at least one brown person in the singing. The action was not intended to exclude black people from that experience. They simply did not have enough regard for the souls for which the spirituals were created to include them in the celebration. That experience, adds a layer of perplexity considering how Negro Spirituals serve as an affirmation of African Americans, as being made in the image of God. The spiritual speaks to the

African American's capacity to create something incredibly theological, something that churches all over America would find meaningful in their worship experiences. Negro Spirituals, very unobtrusively, have been woven into the American Christian experience, yet many do not see the Negro when they engage in singing these songs. The Negro is deemed invisible. Failure to recognize or value one's humanity is indeed a violation of the *imago dei*, the notion that we are all visible creatures made in the image of God and have sacred worth.

In delving deeper within the concept of the *Imago Dei* for this chapter, the author outlined its dueling interpretations over the years, while concluding with her own. For the church to walk authentically in its purpose of sharing the love of Christ with each other and the world, the *Imago Dei* must be reclaimed. If the mainline church truly seeks to move beyond racial separation, it is imperative that we see each other as brothers and sisters, each made in God's image for a purpose. Despite conflict, God's love and grace extend to each person. The concept of the *Imago Dei* reinforces the importance of embracing the other. It causes one to recognize their own humanity, that each have limitations, that we are all dependent on God, and that God has given us each other to lift each other as we climb to achieve perfection.

The issue of racial imagination in the church will also be addressed, a concept that has caused many Western European and American Christians to deny the humanity of those who are not white. J Kameron Carter explains that this process of Christian racialization began when modern Christians attempted to sever Christ from Jesus, thus severing Christ from his Jewish body.¹

¹ J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008), 108.

In the historical chapter, the evolution of black Christianization in America and white Christians' resistance was explored as a result. As black Christians became more rooted in their faith, establishing their own Christian identities and traditions, history shows that white American Christians were at the forefront of denying their place within the Body of Christ. This dreadful history began when slaveholders initially refused to baptize their slaves, having a concern that baptism would make the African slaves, "human," and continued through the Civil War and Reconstruction Era when African Americans were finally free to invest in their communities and churches. History shows that in what would become one of the most prosperous times for the African American church, the Klu Klux Klan (KKK) evolved, mostly targeting black churches and pastors, who not only led those churches but were also pillars of the community. The issue of the Imago Dei is of great concern here. If white American Christians honestly saw black Christians as their brothers and sisters in Christ, made in God's image as they were, why would it be so challenging for them to accept and even encourage prosperity among black churches and communities? There are many answers to this question, but most of all, power was one of their most significant concerns. The chapter will discuss how white Christians reimagined themselves to fit the likeness of God solely. In doing so, they self-promoted themselves the authority on all things Christian. As a result, they refused to ordain black pastors and forced themselves into black churches as presiding elders because they firmly believed they could not truly have a church without their leadership and guidance. The Imago Dei not only affirms one's humanity, but it also affirms one's close connection to God. This notion would suggest that black Christians were deeply

bonded with God, just as much as white Christians were, and this issue of paternalism in the church additionally violates the Imago Dei concerning black American Christians.

We first find the concept of the imago dei, Latin for the image of God, in the first creation narrative of Genesis.

God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’ So God created humankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female.²

The Imago Dei can inform our understanding of human creation, existence, and purpose.

Ryan S. Peterson explains that the Imago Dei speaks to humanity’s identity, one that extends to all of humankind and not to select individuals.³ “God created humanity to establish an earthly image of God in the world. Humanity is thereby bound to God and God’s purposes for creation.”⁴ He further explains that, in our quest to define ourselves as being made in the image of God, we must first establish an understanding of God’s nature.⁵ This can be a challenging task because there’s only so much that we could truly understand about God. In Isaiah 55, God declares, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” The pursuit of uncovering what it truly means to be made in the image of God may be limited as God continuously maintains a great sense of mystery for many. Carl F. H. Henry contends that

² Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding* (Cambridge, MA: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 139.

³ Ryan S. Peterson, *The Imago Dei as Human Identity* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016), 1.

⁴ Peterson, *The Imago Dei as Human Identity*, 1.

⁵ Peterson, *The Imago Dei as Human Identity*, 1.

we cannot fully define the Imago Dei through biblical terms while Charles Lee Feinberg claims that, “biblical data furnish no systemic theory of the subject, no clue as to what is implied.”⁶ Richard Middleton explains that, for these reasons, many scholars have pursued extrabiblical texts, often philosophical, to make sense of the imago dei.⁷ The scripture does indeed provide clues to God’s nature about the Imago Dei that can be celebrated and explored. Many interpreters agree that the imago dei, as referenced in Genesis the first chapter, sets a conceptual framework to reveal how humanity was made in God's image, but scholars have failed to come to a consensus on one succinct interpretation.⁸

The image has been taken to refer to the human soul (since God is spiritual), the human mind (since God is rational), the human body (since ancient Near Eastern people thought that gods had physical forms), human dominion (since God rules all things), human relations (since God, being triune is eternally relational), human virtue (since God is good), and human existence (since God is).⁹

Something that can be celebrated about the Imago Dei is the fact that we are not limited to a straightforward interpretation. As we are made in the image of God, a being who cannot be limited to one explanation, we too should not restrict how we define ourselves.

Many early Western theologians typically understood the image of God through humanity’s capacity to reason while many in the Greek East understood the imago more spiritually, “as the progressive conformity of the soul to God or a salvific partaking of the divine nature, a process typically called divination.”¹⁰ During the Reformation, another

⁶ Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2005), 17.

⁷ Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 17.

⁸ Peterson, *The Imago Dei as Human Identity*, 1.

⁹ Peterson, *The Imago Dei as Human Identity*, 2.

¹⁰ Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 20.

concept of the Imago Dei emerged, highly influenced by Martin Luther, that would suggest the image has more to do with “ethical conformity” or obedience to God. For Martin Luther, the image of God relates to original righteousness which, unfortunately, was lost through Adam and Eve’s sin but restored through Jesus Christ.¹¹ Karl Barth attempted to take a different approach, proposing that the image of God, “refers to the God-given capacity of human beings in their co-humanity (male and female) to be addressed by and respond to God’s word.”¹²

In his book, *The Liberating Image*, Richard Middleton explores the interpretation of defining the Imago Dei as human dominion over creation. He contends that the Imago Dei is revealed through humanity’s authority and capacity to rule human creation.¹³ “God is the ruler of all things, so God’s earthly image is an earthly ruler.”¹⁴ Middleton goes on to say that our human vocation is, “modeled on the nature and actions of the God portrayed in Genesis 1.”¹⁵ He explains that human rule should resemble God’s divine rule.¹⁶ In Middleton’s view, the Imago Dei speaks mostly to human agency and authority. This notion can be understood in two ways. First, humanity resembles God in exercising royal power on earth.¹⁷ Secondly, human authority to rule has been delegated

¹¹ Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 20.

¹² Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 22.

¹³ Peterson, *The Imago Dei as Human Identity*, 2.

¹⁴ Peterson, *The Imago Dei as Human Identity*, 2.

¹⁵ Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 60.

¹⁶ Peterson, *The Imago Dei as Human Identity*, 2.

¹⁷ Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 88.

to the degree in which we become partners with God in ruling the earth.¹⁸ Both suppositions intersect and define not only human identity but also human responsibility. “The first expression- the notion of likeness to the divine ruler- suggests the image as ‘representational,’ indicating a similarity or analogy between God and humans.”¹⁹ He goes on to explain that the second analogy concerns the notion that humanity is also, “representative, designating the responsible office and task entrusted to humanity in administering the earthly realm on God’s behalf.”²⁰ Genesis 1:1-2:3 appears to affirm this interpretation, as it recalls God’s instructions to humankind, “be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.” “Humans are called to continue God’s creative activity by populating and organizing the unformed and unfilled earth. God has started the process, which humans, as God’s earthly delegates, are to continue.”²¹

Taking Middleton’s interpretation, a step further, one must ponder over the question, what does it mean to rule? How do humans, specifically Christian humans, understand their role as God’s earthly delegates? What must this require of us? Francis Watson explains that following the *Imago Dei* as human identity, rooted in Jesus, can define this for us. Jesus as the living God becomes our living image.²² While Jesus is understood as the image of God, we are merely made in the likeness of that image. “If Jesus is indeed the paradigmatic case of human likeness to God, then the notion of an original universal creation of humankind in the image of God must be understood to be

¹⁸ Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 88.

¹⁹ Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 88.

²⁰ Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 88.

²¹ Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 89.

²² Peterson, *The Imago Dei as Human Identity*, 82.

retrospectively constituted.”²³ Humanity, as being made in the image of God, “fragmentarily and partially reproduce Jesus’s being and action in the world.”²⁴ Our identity and purpose are rooted in “conformity” to Jesus’s being and action.²⁵ If Christians genuinely desire to live into their identities as God’s earthly delegates, they must come to understand what it means to become more Christ-like. Denying this in a sense is denying the Imago Dei because Jesus loved all of humanity so sincerely and fervently. He stood for those who could not stand for themselves, the poor, the sick, and even the sinners. The depth of Jesus’ devotion and love for humanity ran so incredibly deep to the point where he was even willing to give up everything, including his life, to give us an opportunity to become the best versions of ourselves. Jesus was a selfless teacher, friend, and exemplary. Though humanity can never be Jesus, they can attempt to live in ways that reflect his teachings. His two commandments to love our neighbors as we love ourselves and to love God with all heart, mind, and soul can guide our efforts in this regard. As creations made in the likeness of God, love must be the very thing that drives us. Our actions toward others must be rooted in love. Humans are like God’s earthly delegates when governed in such a way. Loving our neighbor requires valuing our neighbor’s sacred worth. Failure to love neighbor, denying the humanity of the other, is also a failure to realize one’s true identity and purpose as revealed in the imago dei. If one denies a person’s humanity, he or she, in a sense, is denying his or her own.

²³ Francis Watson, *Text and Truth* (London, UK: T and T Clark International, 1997), 291.

²⁴ Peterson, *The Imago Dei as Human Identity*, 12.

²⁵ Peterson, *The Imago Dei as Human Identity*, 12.

In his book, *The Divine Image*, Ian McFarland suggests that the Imago Dei is less about the knowledge of humanity and more about the wisdom of God.²⁶ He explains that, “God is made known through Jesus, who is made known through the body of Christ.”²⁷ Because of the incarnation, divine destiny is joined to human destiny. Through divine action, human creatures are made in the body of Christ.”²⁸ This reinforces the notion that the Imago Dei assumes a deep sense of human connectedness. Humanity has been created in God's image, and our humanity binds us together. It was not God’s intention for human creatures to estrange themselves from one another. McFarland goes on to explain that the world experiences Jesus through the body. “As it happens, the particular form of Jesus’s human life implicates the totality of other human beings. As members or participants in Christ, we are the means of his glorification even as he is the source of ours.”²⁹ McFarland’s interpretation can be invaluable for Christian faith communities. It is imperative that churches, especially the mainline churches, come to understand the importance of embracing the other as a unit. Just as the individual cannot truly live into his or her God-intended purpose by denying the other, the church cannot truly achieve its mission. Christ cannot dwell in a space that does not reflect his love, grace, and compassion. Christ cannot be glorified in churches that are intentional in denying seats at the table. The body of Christ is the vessel through which the world comes to understand

²⁶ Ian McFarland, *The Divine Image: Envisioning the Invisible God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 11.

²⁷ McFarland, *The Divine Image*, 55.

²⁸ McFarland, *The Divine Image*, 55.

²⁹ McFarland, *The Divine Image*, 55.

and experience God's love and nature. As previously mentioned, we look to God to learn more about ourselves. God is revealed when we choose to love one another.

Colin Gunton understands the Imago Dei as personhood on divine intra-Trinitarian terms. In an attempt to take Karl Barth's interpretation a step further, Gunton explains that the image of God should be considered not merely through human relations to God, but also through relationships with other humans, and non-human creation.³⁰ This interpretation calls us to see God moving beyond ourselves, contexts, and norms.

"Gunton emphasizes the need for particularity and community through a conception of otherness and relation. The freedom to be other and yet to stand in intimate communion is a created metaphor of God's intra-Trinitarian life."³¹ This interpretation speaks to the importance of encountering God through the other. Ryan S. Peterson contends that Gunton's theology does not hold together exegetically, but there can be meaning in defining the Imago Dei in a way that would charge one to look beyond his or her nature.

John F. Kilner's interpretation of the Imago Dei as an indicator of human dignity and destiny resonated the most with the author. He explains that humanity is deeply connected to God, through creation. Humans each have a bond that cannot be broken. Christ renews the connection with God and brings forth dignity for all of humanity. Kilner explains that this is every human's realized destiny; to be made by God, intimately connected by way of creation, and renewed through the living image of God, Jesus Christ.³² Kilner unpacks previous interpretations of the Imago Dei and debates the notion

³⁰ Peterson, *The Imago Dei as Human Identity*, 10.

³¹ Peterson, *The Imago Dei as Human Identity*, 10.

³² John F. Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015),

that Imago Dei should be understood regarding human capacities to reason, rule, be righteous, and maintain relationships. This interpretation seems reasonable and logical but, unfortunately, people have used this concept to deny the humanity of others. “Accordingly, people vary in the extent to which they have these attributes. For many, that means how much people warrant respect and protection varies from person to person.”³³ When the Europeans encountered the Africans for the first time, they considered them animals and heathens—unhuman, because, in their minds, they were not intellectuals. Secondly, they certainly could not be righteous and Christian. This mindset made enslaving the Africans justifiable. Many Christians have attached themselves to an unbiblical idea of the Imago Dei while strangely deeming it biblical.³⁴ Kilner asserts that, “misunderstandings of being made in God’s image have contributed to some of the greatest atrocities in history, and it is a great gain to understand it in a way that is not conducive to such devastation.”³⁵

The Imago Dei is significant because it liberates people from oppression, whether it is racial, economic, or social. Concerning poverty, Clement of Rome proclaimed the importance of doing good and no harm to every human being just because of the imago dei. “You should do good to and pay honor and reverence to man, who is made in the image of God...; minister food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, clothing to the naked, hospitality to the stranger, and necessary things to the prisoner; and that is what will be regarded as genuinely bestowed upon God.”³⁶ Martin Luther King, Jr, in his efforts to

³³ Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny*, 3.

³⁴ Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny*, 3.

³⁵ Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny*, 4.

³⁶ Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny*, 8.

overcome poverty, also appealed to the status of those impoverished as human beings made in God's image.³⁷ In the same vein, the sick and disabled have been denied their humanity, similarly through marginalization. Throughout the centuries, initiatives to overcome the oppression of certain groups, driven by the concept of humanity's creation in God's image, continued from the Native Americans to enslaved Africans.³⁸ Before African slavery reared its ugly head in America, the Native Americans endured brutality perpetrated by the Spanish in the West Indies and other areas of the Caribbean and Americas.³⁹ Some Spanish friars discouraged the abuse of these indigenous people.⁴⁰ "Their motivation was simply, 'the abiding confidence that they would not encounter any human being in any rural compound or village who was not created in the likeness of God.'"⁴¹ While they risked their lives, speaking out on behalf of the oppressed native peoples, there were also church leaders back in Spain, who agreed with their sentiments. Francisco de Vitoria, a Spanish Roman Catholic theologian and philosopher, was among those contenders. He contended that Native Americans were not any different from the Europeans because of the *imago dei*. He and his colleagues used this rationale to challenge Spanish efforts in validating their domination over indigenous people.⁴² Batholeomé de las Casas was considered one of the most zealous defenders of the indigenous people in the West Indies and was even appointed, "Protector of the

³⁷ Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny*, 8.

³⁸ Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny*, 9.

³⁹ Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny*, 9.

⁴⁰ Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny*, 9.

⁴¹ Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny*, 10.

⁴² Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny*, 10.

Indians.”⁴³ Las Casas once said of the Native Americans, “the image of God, in which they have been created, is present in all of them. This is the root of their most elementary human rights.”⁴⁴

In harmony with Genesis 9:6 and James 3:9, Las Casas realized that to abuse what is in God's image was tantamount to abusing God, who for Las Casas was most visibly God-in-Christ. Upon returning to Spain, he responded to questions from a lawyer of the Inquisition by saying, "I left Christ in the Indies not once, but thousand times beaten, afflicted, insulted, and crucified by those Spaniards who destroy and ravage the Indians."⁴⁵

Similarly, critics of African slavery in America made the argument that subjecting the Africans to such oppression was a violation of their humanity and a violation of the *imago dei*. Gregory of Nyssa, an early church father, is considered by many as the first abolitionist of slavery asking, “What price did you put on the likeness of God? Who is his seller?... God does not sell what is free.”⁴⁶ Fredrick Douglass spoke very passionately about the *Imago Dei* in his speeches regarding African slavery. He along with Henry Garnet, a runaway slave, and another critic of slavery, Gerrit Smith, began labeling slavery as a “violation of people's divine creation in God's image.”⁴⁷ Kilner mentions that the appeals to the image of God were not solely directed towards slaveholders but also to the slaves.⁴⁸ Abolitionists made considerable efforts to help the slaves come to understand their sacred worth as being made in the image of God. Under this assumption,

⁴³ Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny*, 10.

⁴⁴ Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny*, 10.

⁴⁵ Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny*, 10.

⁴⁶ Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny*, 10.

⁴⁷ Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny*, 12.

⁴⁸ Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny*, 12.

the slaves were encouraged to resist and challenge their enslavement.⁴⁹ Post-slavery, Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King, Jr., were among many civil rights leaders who maintained the notion that racial justice could be realized through the imago dei. “The image of God provides the theological basis for black people's struggle for survival.⁵⁰” King, in particular, lodged his appeal for civil rights in an interpretation of Imago Dei that was grounded in the claims of scripture.⁵¹ King engaged previous abolitionists’ arguments, appealing to the imago dei, in his efforts to establish a theologically and biblically sound position on civil rights issues. The Imago Dei has been at the core of many debates regarding social concerns throughout the world as some believe that this theological concept has enlightened the oppressed as well as the oppressors.⁵² Kilner explains that the imago dei’s influence is made clear: In the “black church’s historic mission to rescue man as the image of God,” in the, “language of power and survival (in the music of African American spirituals) that celebrate African Americans as imago dei,” and in a “black theology in which one’s blackness signifies being created in God’s image.”⁵³

While there were those who opposed slavery and oppression in all forms, many white Americans found justification in enforcing such tyranny. White Americans, and the Europeans before them, often saw in themselves traits that would resemble God’s

⁴⁹ Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny*, 12.

⁵⁰ Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny*, 13.

⁵¹ Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny*, 13.

⁵² Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny*, 14.

⁵³ Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny*, 14.

likeness while failing to see those same traits in people of color.⁵⁴ Absurdly, whiteness became a trait attributed to God's likeness. In 1900, Charles Carroll's well-known book entitled, *The Negro a Beast*, also known as "In the Image of God," he alleges that, "If the White was created in the image of God, then the Negro was made after some other model."⁵⁵ He explained that the concept of the Imago Dei was not relevant when it came to black people.⁵⁶ This book has been criticized for its incitement of violence against black people in America. The Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia at Ferris State University charged Carroll's book on the deficiency of God's image in African Americans as integral in the thousands of lynchings that took place between 1882 and 1951.⁵⁷ There was a movement of white Christian identity going on at this time that became disturbingly violent, as groups such as the KKK, Aryan Nations, and The Covenant, The Sword, and The Arm of the Lord felt justified and even empowered, to perpetuate such violence against those who they felt could never achieve righteousness because of the color of their skin. This "Christian Identity" movement as Kilner calls it, occurred during the latter half of the twentieth century.⁵⁸

People associated with this movement give multiple accounts of why only white people are in God's image. For example, some say that certain races are related to creatures that pre-date Adam (one of Carroll's arguments). Others maintain that certain races descend from Cain, who was the offspring of Eve and Satan and so was "made in the image and likeness of Satan."

⁵⁴ Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny*, 23.

⁵⁵ Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny*, 25.

⁵⁶ Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny*, 25.

⁵⁷ Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny*, 27.

⁵⁸ Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny*, 27.

Kilner explains that sin is at the root of this imago deficiency. He explains that sin, “disposes people to see themselves (and those like them) as better than they are, and to see other people who are very different from them as the ones who are damaged.”⁵⁹ “Damaged” could be understood as someone who has fallen short or as someone who is considered sub-human.⁶⁰

The sin of white Christians likening God in their own image is the root of concern in J. Kameron Carter’s concept of racial imagination. In his book, *Race: A Theological Account*, he unpacks how theology has been abused to racialize minorities while securing racist agendas. He proposes that the Christian problem with race began with the Jews. “Modernity’s racial imagination has its genesis in the theological problem of Christianity’s quest to sever itself from its Jewish roots.”⁶¹ He asserts that Judaism was deemed an “oriental” religion of the east, while Christianity was celebrated as a western religion, superior to Judaism. He explains that the Jews, were the first in the Christian world to become racialized while Christ was extracted from his Jewish body, absurdly becoming white.

For at the genealogical taproot of modern racial reasoning is the process by which Christ was abstracted from Jesus, and thus from his Jewish body, thereby severing Christianity from its Jewish roots. Jewish flesh at this moment underwent a religious conversion: it was converted into racial flesh, positioned within a hierarchy of racial-anthropological essences, and lodged within a now racialized chain of being. In making Christ non-Jewish at this moment, he was made a figure of the Occident. He became white, even if Jesus as a historical figure remained Jewish or racially a figure of the Orient. Theology’s participation in this process is what makes it modern.⁶²

⁵⁹ Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny*, 28.

⁶⁰ Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny*, 28.

⁶¹ Carter, *Race: A Theological Account*, 3.

⁶² Carter, *Race: A Theological Account*, 6-7.

White Christians of the west likened themselves in the image of God to the point where even Jesus becomes a white man. In effect, Carter explains that white Christians' agendas became aligned with God's. Not only is this a violation of the Imago Dei but this can also be considered a form of idolatry. The author also contends that severing Christ from Jesus is an assault on Christian salvation. Many Christians understand that Jesus was fully human and fully divine. He had to be both to atone for the sins of humanity. If a Christian denies Jesus' Jewish body, he or she also denies his or her salvation. Jesus' Jewishness was at the root of his humanity, and it is intolerable to extract parts of his humanity. Howard Thurman poses the question in *Jesus and the Disinherited*, "How different might have been the story of the last two thousand years on this planet grown old from suffering if the link between Jesus and Israel had never been severed?"⁶³ Taking his question a step further, the author ponders over where the mainline American church could be today if this severing of Christ from Jesus had not occurred, though it is still a theological misconception of many Christians (mainly Western) of today.

While exploring Emmanuel Kant's work regarding race, Carter unpacks Christian racialization explaining a dynamic that is quite fascinating. He asserts that white Christians are not racialized as non-whites. Minorities become racialized to the point where they can never achieve the moral, practically divine status of whites. White Christians, "avoided the whole messiness of race by virtue of having stunted the process of racialization. Consequently, they are not a race in the same way that the other human races have become races."⁶⁴ He goes on to say that the racialization process for black

⁶³ Howard Thurman, *Jesus, and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996), **add page number**.

⁶⁴ Carter, *Race: A Theological Account*, 89.

people, or people with darker skin, has occurred to the point where dark skin becomes an impediment on one's human's existence.⁶⁵ While those with darker complexions are deemed sinful for merely being born with dark skin, those with white skin are considered to be supraracial, hence, beyond the point of being judged by the color of their skin.⁶⁶ Carter notes a fascinating contrast from Kant. "Negroes and whites are the base races. If the white race exemplifies humanity on its way to perfection, the black race embodies the departure and failure to attain this perfection."⁶⁷ The American mainline church has existed under this assumption, perhaps both consciously and unconsciously. This assumption gave charge to those who sought to enslave African people. This assumption empowered churches post-slavery to treat black worshippers like second-class Christians, forcing them to sit in balconies, denying them communion until white worshippers were served first. Specifically, in the Methodist church, this assumption also gave charge to white elders who refused to ordain black preachers to administer the sacraments, while inserting themselves in newly formed black churches as presiding elders.

In considering the erasure of black voices on a Sunday when the congregation sang Negro Spirituals in an attempt to honor Martin Luther King's efforts toward economic and racial equality, the author would not go as far to say that black voices were excluded because there were some who felt that black voices were not worthy enough or "Christian" enough to sing the spirituals. There was not enough regard for black voices to be included in such a celebration. The author's congregation is predominantly white. The

⁶⁵ Carter, *Race: A Theological Account*, 89.

⁶⁶ Carter, *Race: A Theological Account*, 90.

⁶⁷ Carter, *Race: A Theological Account*, 90.

worship experience is led predominantly by them. They did not consider including black voices because they are not accustomed to hearing them in worship. The author believes that what they are experiencing in the mainline church today are congregants who have descended from a very racist “Christian” ideology regarding people of color. Its manifestation today seems more implicit. Failure to include people of color in scenarios where their presence should be warranted is an example of that. Hailing white leaders, particularly white men, on all things Christian, even when it comes to church planting, is another example. Many may not go as far to say that black people can never achieve the righteousness of whites, but the actions of the mainline church, in upholding its segregated way of life, would mainly suggest that people of color do not have much to offer the Body of Christ. All Christians should affirm the fact that every single human being, as being made in the image of God, has a place and should be welcomed to the table, is loved immensely and equally by God and has been gifted something extraordinary to offer the Body of Christ.

The concept of the Imago Dei points to our identity and purpose in Christ. As Genesis the first chapter articulates, man and woman were created in the likeness of God. If we hold scripture as our authority on human creation, we would have to understand that not a human on earth was created in isolation from the events of Genesis. Having that said, one should assume that this creation of humanity being made in the image of God applies to every single human being, regardless of ethnicity, background, capacity, or virtue.

To resolve the Imago Dei crisis in the mainline church, congregants should, as previously mentioned, position themselves to see, hear, and experience the presence of

God outside of themselves. By placing one's image in the likeness of God would be more challenging in this regard. We cannot begin to heal the wounds of the past until we recognize those who do not share our backgrounds as children of sacred worth. Churches must look first to the sins of Christians who have come before us and intentionally pursue racial reconciliation, challenging ideologies that have scarred the mainline church primarily as a racially divisive institution. As John Kilner would suggest, "racial solidarity is the goal, in which, appreciation of the diversity of God's purpose for humanity in God's image is the norm. Affirming humanity's creation in God's image is a powerful way to mobilize the church to oppose racism in word and deed."

As we seek to reclaim the *imago dei*, it is imperative that we do not merely "see" the other, but that we also embrace the other, that we love the other as our brother or sister. As the author embarks on this journey with her congregation, she hopes to challenge them in discerning what it truly means to love the other and how the concept of the *Imago Dei* informs their perceptions of the other. At the core of the *Imago Dei* is God's transformative, never-ending, love, interest, and compassion for all of humanity. We come to know of this love through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and because Christ first loved us, we should pursue loving each other more authentically as much as we possibly we can. This is a journey as we continue to find ways to love our neighbors more fervently day by day.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

For centuries, American Christians have been mainly complicit, not only religiously, but socially and politically, in upholding racism in all of its forms. It was mentioned in the theological chapter that the contemporary church has descended from a very racist past. It cannot be assumed that our mainline churches are still mostly segregated today because most people genuinely prefer to worship in isolation from other ethnic groups. The mainline church, as it stands today, is a byproduct of historical divisiveness regarding race in our society. Part of the reason why society is incapable of moving beyond segregation in the church is because worshippers are not aware of this history and how it has impacted them. As pastors gaze down the pews on Sunday morning, they are likely to see people who like alike, failing to realize that there is a story behind this. Too many people understand this as the norm and do not feel the need to challenge it. Church segregation is so normative to the point where many congregants do not consider the need to have conversations on race. In Beverly Tatum's book, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria*, she mentioned a white woman who explained that she was raised in a homogenous environment, where race never came up. It never came up because everyone looked the same. Race was not a factor in her community. Similarly, most of the mainline churches are comprised of people who look

the same and conversations on race relations and racial healing do not always have a place at the table.

Last spring, the author led a class on race for about twelve parishioners. One student was in her thirties, and the rest were over sixty-five. Most were from the south, but a few were from northern towns. On the first day, as they introduced themselves, the author asked them to share a scenario in which they were the ethnic minority among a group of people. Only two could recall such an instance. One explained that a dear African American co-worker passed away and she decided to attend her funeral at a predominantly black church. That was the first experience she had in a black church. Another student mentioned that she once drove into the “black” part of town to take her housekeeper home. The author, on the other hand, shared a plethora of encounters that she had since kindergarten. Many were struck by the fact that most of the people in the room could recall moment when they were not among the ethnic majority in the room.

The author realized at that moment that most of the congregation could identify with always being the majority, wherever they go, and many of them are ignorant when it comes to race. They are mostly unaware of the various forms of racism and how they rear themselves in the church and even in their hearts perhaps. It is not possible to fix something that one is not aware is broken. One cannot begin a conversation on diversity and multiculturalism until one has tackled the elephant in the room. The author believes that critical race theory (CRT) would be helpful in explaining what is broken and how the community of faith could attempt to fix it. Critical race theory will be invaluable in helping the congregation understand the racial disparities in society today and how the sins of the past have led to the current condition of the church. CRT can provide a deeper

understanding of their white privilege and debunk racial myths (perhaps subconscious myths) that hinder racial healing in society and the church. The author chose CRT scholarship in education as a model because the church and the school have many similarities. Both have a significant influence on people's lives. Churches and schools are sanctuaries where people go to have their lives enriched. Schools are so much more than schools for so many people, and a person's education can determine the entire trajectory of his or life. Both are public places shaped by their surroundings and, like the church, racial divisions are interwoven in the fabric of the education system in America. As the author outlined how racism has impacted the mainline church, the education system has endured its own battle. CRT offers critiques of various racial issues in education including meritocracy, liberalism, and colorblindness which are not issues that are limited to education. The author will conclude with perspectives and solutions for racial healing, including writings from white authors who have made considerable strides in this effort.

Critical race theory scholarship explores social and political dynamics regarding race and how they can potentially intersect with other issues regarding sexual orientation, gender, and socio-economic status. "The critical race theory movement is a collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power."¹ The movement evolved out of two previous moments, critical legal studies and radical feminism.² CRT challenges the status quo and even takes a closer look at policies designed to achieve equality for people of color.

The movement considers many of the same issues that conventional civil rights and ethnic studies discourses take up but places them in a broader perspective that

¹ Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (New York, NY: New York Press, 2017), 3.

² Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory*, 5.

includes economics, history, setting, group, and self-interest. Unlike traditional civil rights discourse, which stresses incrementalism and step-by-step progress, critical race theory questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law.³

According to CRT, our society is not well equipped to address and resolve all of the issues regarding race. There are various names for the racism that plagues the community which includes, but not limited to, “biological racism, intentional racism, unconscious racism, microaggressions, nativism, institutional racism, racism-tinged with homophobia or sexism, racism that takes the form of indifference, coldness, or implicit associations, and white privilege.”⁴

Many theorists would agree on the basic CRT tenets of ordinariness, interest-convergence, social construction, and differential racialization. Ordinariness speaks to racism as an ordinary dynamic in our society today, one that is difficult to overcome. Racism is so embedded in our way of life to the point where, in many cases, it is not recognized.⁵ Interest-convergence concerns the idea that because white people largely benefit from racism, they do not have a desire to eradicate it. It assumes that white people are not willing to pursue equality unless they can benefit from it in some way.⁶ Social construction holds that race is not biological but human-made. “Races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient.”⁷ Differential racialization recognizes how the dominant society tends to racialize various minority groups at

³ Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory*, 3.

⁴ Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory*, 31.

⁵ Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory*, 8.

⁶ Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory*, 9.

⁷ Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory*, 9.

different times. This concept assumes that the racialization occurs at times when it may be useful to do so, particularly when there is a labor need.⁸ In *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic draw an example of this. “At one period, society may have had little use for blacks but much need for Mexican or Japanese agricultural workers. At another time, the Japanese, including citizens of long standing, may have been in intense disfavor and removed to war relocations camps.”⁹ While these once favored Japanese were imprisoned in internment camps, other ethnic groups were utilized for jobs in the war industry.¹⁰

CRT scholars note that the highly criticized myth of meritocracy, a system in which success is determined only by one’s abilities, that everyone has an opportunity to be successful was at the root of Jim Crow era policies, including the “separate but equal” standard. The Supreme Court ruling in *Plessy versus Ferguson* enforced this standard. “Under these standards, those with merit were to rise beyond their station in life even though that process was to take place in a separate but equal world.”¹¹ While the ruling was established to bring forth equality, it did just the opposite, enabling society to become even more racially divisive. On the surface, it would appear that the mainline church is still functioning under a “separate but equal” institution. Perhaps most do not oppose the idea of worshipping among diverse groups of people, but I suspect there is a subconscious understanding that we do not worship together.

⁸ Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory*, 10.

⁹ Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory*, 10.

¹⁰ Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory*, 10.

¹¹ Margaret Zamudio et al., *Critical Race Theory Matters: Education and Ideology* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), 11.

Regarding meritocracy in the field of education, CRT scholars argue that in schooling, students are not on an equal playing field and some are not capable of achieving what others can.¹² “Meritocracy assumes a level playing field where all individuals in society have an equal opportunity to succeed. It also assumes that one’s work ethic, values, drive, and individual attributes such as aptitude and intelligence, determine success or failure.”¹³ In *Waking Up White*, Debbie Irving recalls having a discussion with a teacher about this concept, discussing the difference between equity and equality.¹⁴ “Equality means giving every student exactly the same thing to meet the same expectation. Equity means both holding people of differing needs to a single expectation and giving them what they need to achieve it.”¹⁵

It is imperative that groups, including communities of faith, understand meritocracy and how it impacts people’s perceptions of policies implemented to provide opportunities for minorities including welfare and affirmative action. Debbie Irving recalls an “equity in action” story of the Montgomery County Public School (MCPS) system in Maryland. This urban school district, made up of 202 schools discovered there was an achievement gap among racial lines. The school superintendent, Jerry Weast, sought to uncover what the specific issues were regarding the racial and economic disparities in the district. He identified each school into two different categories, Green Zone schools, and Red Zone schools. “Green Zone schools were in higher-income,

¹² Zamudio et al., *Critical Race Theory Matters*, 11.

¹³ Zamudio et al., *Critical Race Theory Matters*, 12.

¹⁴ Debbie Irving, *Waking Up White* Cambridge, Cambridge, MA: Elephant Room Press, 2014), 206.

¹⁵ Irving, *Waking Up White*, 207.

predominantly white neighborhoods and considered among the nation's best public schools."¹⁶ One could guess that the Red Zone schools were the under-performing schools. "Red Zone schools were in high-minority, low-income neighborhoods, and typical of national patterns, suffered from low achievement and high dropout rates."¹⁷ Using the concept of equity in action, Weast sought to bring the Red Zone schools up to code with the Green Zone schools, while cultivating higher educational goals and standards for even the Green Zone schools.¹⁸ Weast connected with nearly every person in the community, from school teachers and students to government officials and community leaders to gain knowledge of what the needs were.¹⁹

After obtaining input and support from a wide array of people who were connected to the school in some capacity, he and the district decided to allocate more resources to the Red Zone schools.²⁰ Someone who believes in the concept of meritocracy would perceive this as unfair, arguing that all schools should receive the same level of support from the district. MCPS set specific achievement goals for these schools and have since seen some progress. They experienced a significant decline in school drop-out rates.²¹ Irving attributes Weast's improvement to his approach in distancing himself from dominant, status quo behaviors.²² Alternatively, he utilized a

¹⁶ Irving *Waking Up White*, 207.

¹⁷ Irving *Waking Up White*, 207.

¹⁸ Irving *Waking Up White*, 207.

¹⁹ Irving *Waking Up White*, 207.

²⁰ Irving *Waking Up White*, 207.

²¹ Irving *Waking Up White*, 207.

²² Irving *Waking Up White*, 207.

method that CRT would identify as counternarrative. He approached parents, students, teachers, bus drivers, and civic leaders, to name a few, to understand what the issues and needs truly were.²³ Irving shares a few examples of how he rose above white cultural norms to create a racially equitable plan.²⁴

He replaced conflict avoidance with explicit conversation and conflict resolution. He sought knowledge gained from both formal education and life experience soliciting input from everyone, from data analysts to bus drivers. He worked with white communities to examine their degree of comfort and entitlement relative to communities of color. Instead of acting on a sense of urgency, he took the time necessary to include multiple perspectives, develop collaborations and consensus, and think about long-term impacts. By replacing competitiveness with a sense of community and collaboration, he allowed the entire district to feel part of a whole, not like 202 schools fighting school by school for limited resources. He allowed people to free themselves from emotional restraint by encouraging them to speak their minds passionately. He replaced judgment with curiosity by intensely investigating root causes of systemic barriers. Mr. Weast himself even rode the school bus to see what he could learn from that part of students' experience.²⁵

Memphis is a predominantly black, metropolitan city and the contextual congregation is situated right outside of the city limits. Memphis has the second highest child poverty rate in the country as New Orleans has surpassed Memphis recently. The school system, Shelby County Schools, is in disarray. A Shelby County School in Germantown, Germantown High School (predominantly black) is by far the worst looking building in the entire town. Germantown High School is within walking distance of the church as it is situated just across the street. However, most of the teenage members do not attend Germantown High. They attend either private schools or the Germantown Municipal Schools. To cultivate a welcoming and diverse environment, the shortcomings and

²³ Irving *Waking Up White*, 208.

²⁴ Irving *Waking Up White*, 208.

²⁵ Irving *Waking Up White*, 208.

oversights must first be addressed. Why is the predominantly black high school across from our church the worst looking building in Germantown? Germantown High School should not be considered a Red Zone school based on Mr. Weast's criteria, but it is doubtful that they receive the same level of support and resources that other high schools in Germantown may receive. It is imperative that the congregation confirm that poverty and educational disparities among minorities in Memphis and Germantown are problematic as well. A consensus must be reached that the church is responsible for offering support to the communities, including the school officials in uncovering solutions. The church cannot become genuinely inclusive until the issues of the society become the church's issues as well. In becoming a more diverse congregation, the equity in action concept prompts us to look beyond the church walls, discerning what it truly means to become good listeners and advocates for those who so desperately need the church to be the church. If white churches desire to include people of color in their congregations, they should develop an awareness and sensitivity to the issues that plague people of color.

Liberalism is of great concern in the CRT world. "The concept of liberalism underlies the political and economic principles of modern capitalist societies." CRT scholars explain that liberalism should not be confused with the liberal (Democratic) party.²⁶ Liberalism assumes that all people have the same rights and freedom to pursue self-interests.²⁷ This assumption originated during the Enlightenment when monarchies

²⁶ Zamudio et al., *Critical Race Theory Matters*, 15.

²⁷ Zamudio et al., *Critical Race Theory Matters*, 15.

were viewed as oppressors.²⁸ America was founded on the concept of liberalism, yet it has not been applied to all ethnic groups equally. The pledge of allegiance claims liberty and justice for all, but that has not been the case in our society. “The major critique of liberalism is that it constructs an image of society as fair and egalitarian where individuals rise and fall based on their own merits.”²⁹ There is concern that it fails to recognize oppression in all of its forms including racism, patriarchy, and capitalism.³⁰ Power structures that benefit some while disenfranchising others go unnoticed. In education, liberalism supposes that universal schooling provides equal educational opportunities.³¹ The country does offer schooling to all children while many countries around the globe do not; however, one should not assume that all students are receiving the same quality of education. “Critical race theorists in education examine the profound contradiction that exists between the promise of schooling as the great equalizer and the concrete reality of educational inequality.”³² As Mr. Weast noted in his school district, racial inequities determine the educational experiences of youth and children of color.³³ “These experiences translate into poorer schools, deficient teaching, lower achievement, and inadequate preparation for meaningful economic engagement.”³⁴ Civil Rights era desegregation efforts were expected to resolve the educational inequity observed in

²⁸ Zamudio et al., *Critical Race Theory Matters*, 15.

²⁹ Zamudio et al., *Critical Race Theory Matters*, 15.

³⁰ Zamudio et al., *Critical Race Theory Matters*, 16.

³¹ Zamudio et al., *Critical Race Theory Matters*, 16.

³² Zamudio et al., *Critical Race Theory Matters*, 15.

³³ Zamudio et al., *Critical Race Theory Matters*, 15.

³⁴ Zamudio et al., *Critical Race Theory Matters*, 15.

schools of color, but it has not achieved that. Whites found loopholes, even establishing more private schools, to maintain their “separate but equal” culture.

CRT scholars note that traditional civil rights policies for inclusion have failed to relieve racism and inequality. They also indicate that affirmative action, merely allowing a handful of black students in the door, does not offer much in resolving the issue of racism either. “Students of color are allowed to enter the classroom but never on an equal footing. When they walk in, they are subject to the same racial stereotypes and expectations that exist in the larger society.”³⁵ The concept of affirmative action could be compared to the Methodist church’s approach to cross-racial appointments.

Appointments such as these have been more for decades now to bring forth diversity and racial reconciliation, however, cross-racial appointments have failed to accomplish such a task. In most cases, black clergy are appointed to predominantly white congregations while very few white clergy are appointed to predominantly black congregations. Cross-racial appointments, in many cases like affirmative action, fail to cultivate diversity and instead cultivate a culture of assimilation. Students of color feel the pressure to assimilate into the dominant white culture in order to thrive in those spaces while black clergy experience the same pressure in predominantly white congregations. Something that the contextual congregation will have to understand is that while inviting a black person to serve as one of their pastors is a step in the right direction, it does not resolve the issue of racial segregation in the church. Inviting a minority into a white space is just the beginning.

³⁵ Zamudio et al., *Critical Race Theory Matters*, 19.

There is an evolving American misconception that we are a colorblind society.

CRT scholars note colorblindness as one of their most significant concerns.

Colorblindness suggests that today everybody enjoys equal treatment without regard to race. The notion of colorblindness is a product of a liberalist ideology that equates political rights with social equality without interrogating the many ways that race and racism play out in contemporary society to reproduce ongoing social inequality.³⁶

CRT asserts that while our society praises itself on being colorblind, it, very implicitly, still places value on whiteness.³⁷ “When society proceeds in a colorblind fashion, it does not see monochrome. It sees white. Whiteness is the default cultural standard.”³⁸ While colorblind rhetoric assumes a position of equality and racial progressiveness, it is utilized to encourage the undoing of civil rights policies implemented to eradicate inequality including affirmative action.³⁹ Colorblindness in the education world assumes that students who achieve academic success earned their success on their own.⁴⁰ Zamudio, Russell, Rios, and Bridgeman offer an example of this in *Critical Race Theory Matters*:

The white student who works hard at her suburban school earns high marks in her advanced placement classes, studies carefully in her school-funded SAT courses, and makes national merit scholar to gain admission to an elite university appears to do so as an individual. This student worked hard, but her accomplishments were made possible within the suburban context created distinctly to privilege whiteness. Conversely, the Native American student who works hard at his reservation school, earns high marks, does not have access to quality SAT courses nor access to advanced placement classes, fails to achieve national merit distinction, but earns a tribal scholarship to attend a state university is often portrayed as racially advantaged in being awarded scholarship money. This latter student's achievements, despite the racial obstacles he has necessarily had to

³⁶ Zamudio et al., *Critical Race Theory Matters*, 21.

³⁷ Zamudio et al., *Critical Race Theory Matters*, 22.

³⁸ Zamudio et al., *Critical Race Theory Matters*, 22.

³⁹ Zamudio et al., *Critical Race Theory Matters*, 22.

⁴⁰ Zamudio et al., *Critical Race Theory Matters*, 29.

overcome, are minimized to suggest that his race rather than his hard work advantaged him in college admissions.⁴¹

Colorblindness has evolved into a concept the CRT scholars find even more disheartening, post-racialism. It assumes that humanity has overcome racial divisions and that there is no longer a need for policies such as affirmative action. Erasure of affirmative action, however, would not result in an equal playing field. It would give institutions the freedom to deny people of color opportunities. Taking colorblindness a step further, post-racialism, “authorizes a retreat from race. Colorblindness, in comparison, offers a largely normative claim for a retreat from race that is aspirational.”⁴² CRT scholar, Sumi Cho, argues that there is still much work to be done when it comes to racial equality and post-racial rhetoric interferes with this effort.⁴³ Society as a whole cannot continue to make strides towards equality if we are unwilling to acknowledge that race is still an issue for our society. Denying the presence of racial inequality to the point of dissolving programs that offer support to people of color leads to colorblind racism. Colorblind racism enforces white dominance. “It functions to obscure the privilege of whiteness and reverse the gains of the civil rights movement by attacking race-based programs designed to provide historically oppressed groups access to social resources in general, and education in particular.”⁴⁴ It is said to disenfranchise people of color under the guise of progressiveness. CRT scholars would identify colorblind racism as an assault

⁴¹ Zamudio et al., *Critical Race Theory Matters*, 25.

⁴² Zamudio et al., *Critical Race Theory Matters*, 25.

⁴³ Zamudio et al., *Critical Race Theory Matters*, 25.

⁴⁴ Zamudio et al., *Critical Race Theory Matters*, 25.

on people of color.⁴⁵ Colorblind rhetoric is prevalent in many white spaces. It has been stated by several white congregants, and friends stress that they, “don't see color.” The concept of colorblind racism may be quite shocking for the congregants who will participate in the project.

CRT offers a pedagogy that can be helpful in analyzing educational inequality. The elements included in the framework could apply to the project. The congregants will be encouraged to consider how each of these elements could be considered in regards to racial inequality in the church. The components of critical race pedagogy are as follows:

1. Acknowledge the central and intersecting roles of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of subordination in maintaining inequality in curricular structures, processes, and discourses;
2. Challenge dominant, social, and cultural assumptions regarding culture and intelligence, language and capability, objectivity, and meritocracy;
3. Utilize interdisciplinary methods of historical and contemporary analysis to articulate the linkages between educational and societal inequality;
4. Develop counter discourses through storytelling, narratives, chronicles, family histories, scenarios, biographies, and parables that draw on the lived experiences students of color bring to the classroom.⁴⁶

In seeking to cultivate racial diversity, it is imperative that humanity are all on the same page about the existence of racism, acknowledging the fact that it impacts society in various forms. Possibly, the second objective may be more challenging as most of the congregants have lived within a cultural norm that for the most part that has not been challenged. In developing counter-discourses, storytelling will be a significant

⁴⁵ Zamudio et al., *Critical Race Theory Matters*, 30.

⁴⁶ Zamudio et al., *Critical Race Theory Matters*, 92.

component because it requires vulnerability and transparency, two factors that are integral in building relationships beyond racial lines.

CRT also explores epistemological racism, another form of racism experienced in the education field. We understand epistemology as a “system of knowing.”⁴⁷ CRT notes that this system also tends to be racial and gendered.⁴⁸ James Scheurich and Michele Young explore the notion of epistemologies and their potential for being racist. They propose four levels of analysis in considering racism: individual level, institutional level, societal level, and epistemological level.⁴⁹ The individual level concerns racism that one may encounter directly or interpersonally.⁵⁰ The institutional level concerns how institutions perpetuate racism. The societal level supposes that society impacts one’s perceptions.⁵¹ The epistemological level concerns unstated assumptions that drive behaviors. Concerning education, it is, “what the dominant society believes and values at this time and in this place about learning, teaching, and assessment is nested within an epistemological assumption about how knowledge is acquired, whose knowledge is valued, and how it is shared.”⁵² For example, a native Spanish speaking student is disciplined for speaking Spanish in the hallways at school. The epistemological assumption here is that English is the dominant language and perhaps a superior language. The epistemological level assumes that English is a better language for

⁴⁷ Zamudio et al., *Critical Race Theory Matters*, 99.

⁴⁸ Zamudio et al., *Critical Race Theory Matters*, 99.

⁴⁹ Zamudio et al., *Critical Race Theory Matters*, 99.

⁵⁰ Zamudio et al., *Critical Race Theory Matters*, 99.

⁵¹ Zamudio et al., *Critical Race Theory Matters*, 99.

⁵² Zamudio et al., *Critical Race Theory Matters*, 99.

academic success and that other languages spoken in school can hinder learning.⁵³ I would challenge my congregation to consider whether or not racist epistemologies exist in our church. What truths do they affirm that could be regarded as racist?

CRT offers these questions for educators to consider, “whose interests are served in a curriculum constructed with its implicit and explicit Euro American biases? Is such a curriculum racist? How do school curricula undermine the achievement of students of color?”⁵⁴ CRT scholars encourage teachers to consider what is included but also excluded from the textbooks. Educators are called to consider what they display in their classrooms and what messages they send. CRT also encourages educators to pay more attention to school rituals and slogans.⁵⁵ All of these factors have the potential to perpetuate racial oppression. This is something that my congregation should consider as well. What images are displayed around the church and what messages do they send to people of color? What scriptures, liturgy, music, etc. do we tend to include and exclude from the worship experience?

In *Waking Up White*, Debbie Irving utilizes antibullying pedagogy in addressing racism. She explains that if racism were a person, they would be a bully.⁵⁶ It includes three different roles, the bully, the victim, and the bystander.⁵⁷ She explains that very little attention is paid to the bystander. “Traditionally, the approach has been to reprimand the bully and console the victim while ignoring the bystanders, those who

⁵³ Zamudio et al., *Critical Race Theory Matters*, 101.

⁵⁴ Zamudio et al., *Critical Race Theory Matters*, 101.

⁵⁵ Zamudio et al., *Critical Race Theory Matters*, 107.

⁵⁶ Irving, *Waking Up White*, 219.

⁵⁷ Irving, *Waking Up White*, 219.

witness but neither partake in nor stand up to the bullying.”⁵⁸ The bystanders, however, have the most power to impact change.⁵⁹ “Like the kid on the playground, white people often are the ones to be in the position to see the problem in action—policies being developed, hiring strategies being planned, or even racist jokes being tossed around.”⁶⁰ Irving explains that white people have choices in those scenarios. “Do I remain a bystander and stay silent? Or do I become an ally and ask the hard questions about how this might affect the range of people in our community or organization?”⁶¹ In considering racism, the goal is to encourage the bystanders to become allies. Hopefully, the project will encourage members of the congregation to make that shift from bystander to ally. The author is sowing seeds, but the participants will have the power to make a deeper, more long-term impact on the congregation.

The concepts of CRT will be instrumental in cultivating a deeper awareness and understanding of racial complexities in society. CRT moves beyond racialized structures and offers solutions and factors to consider in becoming more inclusive. This process will challenge congregants to examine their privilege and potential biases that lie below the surface.

CRT proposes the following assumptions specific to education perhaps can be applied to my context:

1. CRT contends that racism and race are embedded in American society.
2. CRT highlights historical aspects of racism and links it to the current challenges that students of color face.

⁵⁸ Irving, *Waking Up White*, 219.

⁵⁹ Irving, *Waking Up White*, 219.

⁶⁰ Irving, *Waking Up White*, 220.

⁶¹ Irving, *Waking Up White*, 220.

3. CRT explores the narratives of students from marginalized groups and in doing so, challenges the master narrative that counters their experiences.
4. CRT explores how school structures can potentially set students up for failure.
5. CRT scholars bring forth hope for educators as they provide solutions and practices that may be helpful in overcoming educational inequality.⁶²

The mainline church will not be prepared to engage diversity authentically until they face these realities. The mainline church is mostly a bystander to racism, a truth that causes great pain for many people of color. It is a dire need that mainline churches become more intentional in discussing racial issues but also in discerning how their behaviors may contribute to racial divisiveness. CRT can be a great tool in pursuing church introspection. CRT can encourage congregations to look inward, challenging their assumptions and practices, but it can also encourage the congregation to look outwardly, considering the inequality happening around them every single day and how they might be a part of racial healing.

⁶² Zamudio et al., *Critical Race Theory Matters*, 165.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

I embarked on my project with a racially diverse, ecumenical group of participants from four different churches. I sought to observe how they engaged information about the struggles of the mainline church regarding race. Together we unpacked historical, theological, and social components of racism and strategized ways the church can finally overcome our racist past. Our conversations led us to plan a multicultural worship experience, that in a way, was an experiment to determine whether or not diverse worship can be done well. If it was successful, we would determine what that could mean for a potential shift from predominantly homogenous worship.

Methodology

I implemented five methods of research for my project. Methods include a preliminary questionnaire for my focus group, a Cultural Appreciation in Lifelong Learning (CALL) assessment, which is a short cultural competency test, an eight-session focus group study, a worship service survey, and personal focus group exit-interviews. Most of these methods were applied to my focus group though the worship service survey was taken mostly by the service's participants.

Preliminary Questionnaire

This questionnaire was designed to gauge the focus group's individual attitudes towards the diversity in their churches or lack thereof. Also, personal questions were asked in order to gauge how significant their encounters with race have been over the course of their lives. My focus group included members of my congregation, a senior pastor and parishioner of the Presbyterian church across the street from ours, members from a historically African American Missionary Baptist church a few miles away, and two Hispanic United Methodist pastors.

Cultural Appreciation in Lifelong Learning Assessment

I thought it would be meaningful for the group to take a short cultural competency test in order to understand where they truly fall on the cultural competency continuum. I implemented the CALL assessment which was developed by Dr. Sherri Tapp, a Psychology professor at Oral Roberts University. Dr. Tapp emailed information regarding her instrument on March 1, 2019. She developed this instrument as a part of her doctoral thesis and has since won numerous research awards. Dr. Tapp explains, "The purpose of this instrument is to assess educational training and professional development needs in the area of cultural responsiveness."¹

Dr. Tapp's group descriptions are as follows:

Chris

Those in this group enthusiastically embrace cultural diversity. They feel that societal forces are firmly established that are often repressive to culturally diverse groups. They are very familiar with the impact and operations of oppression and realize that racial discrimination is deeply rooted in society. They understand the

¹ Sherri Tapp, "CALL Assessment," email to author, March 1, 2019.

role culture has played in the development of an identity and worldview of those in culturally diverse groups.²

Alex

Those in this group appreciate cultural diversity. They feel that societal forces have greatly impacted and have limited opportunities for culturally diverse groups. They understand the role culture has played in the development of an identity and worldview of those in culturally diverse groups but believe that culturally diverse groups can benefit from assuming some mainstream traditional values.³

Lee

Those in this group do not eagerly embrace cultural diversity. They believe that the individual rather than societal forces is the major factor influencing a person's social situation. They do not believe that forces such as oppression and racism are deeply rooted in society and are not aware of many institutional barriers that restrict minority groups. They accept mainstream traditional values. They acknowledge that they have very little knowledge of ways for various ethnic groups to adopt the cultural traits of other groups, but they are aware that being born a minority in this society brings with it far more challenges than faced by White people.⁴

Lynn

Those in this group are opposed to cultural diversity. Despite this awareness and knowledge, they reject concepts related to cultural diversity and firmly believe that people should marry within their own race.⁵

Church Unity Focus Group Study

The focus group, comprised of four churches, Germantown United Methodist, Germantown Presbyterian, El Redentor United Methodist, and New Bethel Missionary Baptist. The focus group met for eight sessions. Two of the churches are predominantly white (Germantown UMC and Germantown Pres), while one was black (New Bethel),

² Tapp, "CALL Assessment," email to author, March 1, 2019.

³ Tapp, "CALL Assessment," email to author, March 1, 2019.

⁴ Tapp, "CALL Assessment," email to author, March 1, 2019.

⁵ Tapp, "CALL Assessment," email to author, March 1, 2019.

and the other was Hispanic (El Redentor). These churches, excluding El Redentor, participated in a group called The Partners in Christ. A blooming friendship between the senior pastor of New Bethel and the former senior pastor of Germantown UMC sparked this fellowship. The group met monthly to pursue vital conversations on race and would invite special guests, including a professor from the University of Memphis to give lectures. I was asked to take the lead with this group when my former senior pastor retired. Over the years, the Partners in Christ have been quite diligent in supporting my studies on race.

The focus group for the study included seventeen participants though only eleven participated fully in the study. The purpose of the focus group was to explore various theological, social, and historical dynamics that have influenced racial segregation in the mainline church. The church's complicity in perpetuating racial oppression was also discussed. Finally, the focus group explored what the possibilities could be in evolving from racially homogenous worship, which included planning for a multicultural worship experience to be held on Juneteenth. I recorded each session and kept a journal throughout the study.

Juneteenth Worship Service and Survey

The work of the focus group culminated into a multicultural service that we decided to host on Juneteenth. Juneteenth tends to be an African American celebration but is certainly a holiday that should be celebrated by all Americans. Our multicultural service would celebrate the liberation of slaves in America, celebrating the strides we have made, while addressing the work that still must be done. The Juneteenth Unity

Service would allow white participants an opportunity to educate their peers about the importance of Juneteenth while standing in solidarity with African Americans. The service included bilingual components, diverse participants, and diverse music. The worship service was filmed in order to capture the attendees' engagement. Fifty-seven of those in attendance stayed afterwards to fill out the survey. The purpose of the survey was to gauge their receptiveness to the worship experience, their knowledge of multicultural elements included within the worship experience, and finally, their openness to pursue multicultural worship regularly.

Exit Interviews

I conducted ten interviews with focus group participants. The purpose of the interviews was to provide opportunities for my participants to have more candid conversations with me directly about the subject matter. In group settings, there are those who tend to dominate conversations and I wanted to ensure that every participant's voice was heard. It was articulated that while I was transcribing our conversations, I would not share with the rest of the group the nature of our one-on-one discussions. I would later share broad information regarding each conversation with the focus group and I would not give details regarding who said what.

Implementation

In February 2019, I began reaching out to members of my congregation and neighboring churches who had participated in previous studies on race that I led in the past. I invited them to participate in a church unity study, one that would delve deeply

within the causes of racial segregation in church, seeking to find solutions that would enable our churches to resemble more authentically the diverse body of Christ. I explained the study would be a component of my doctoral project. About eighteen agreed to participate initially while one dropped out before the study began. I decided not to open an invitation to my entire congregation because I believed that change would take place beginning with a core of passionate individuals whom I had already identified while previously leading studies on race.

Before our first meeting, I asked the participants to take the preliminary questionnaire. We began our first session on April 10, 2019 and concluded with the Juneteenth Unity Service on June 19th, 2019. On June 19th, I surveyed the worship service attendees. Most were not a part of the focus group. Around ninety people attended the service. After the service, my focus group met for a debrief. Finally, the exit interviews were conducted within two weeks of the worship service, mostly by phone. Two of the interviews were conducted in person.

I made a few changes to the implementation plan outlined in my project proposal. I did not pursue two focus groups, one male and one female. Instead, I chose to work with one focus group comprised of previous participants from other studies on race. I chose to pursue my project as a next step for those who had been diligently doing the work in this area. Previous race study participants articulated a desire to move beyond our conversations to achieve something practical. This project gave them that opportunity. As mentioned before, most were middle-aged white women from my church. I do believe the study would have been enriched by an all-male focus group; but I simply failed to secure a significant number of men from within my congregation willing

to engage in conversations on race. In other studies, the black men from my church and New Bethel articulated disappointment in observing their absence.

I also decided to forgo the survey following each focus group session. The focus group was asked to do quite a bit of reading for the study, a preliminary questionnaire, and a cultural competency test, which was not included in the project proposal. I did not want to overwhelm them with more surveys. I also came to the realization that the exit interview would accomplish the goal of gauging their learnings, which was the initial goal of the post-survey. I did, however, add a post-survey to be taken after the Juneteenth service. This survey served a different purpose of gauging how receptive the participants were in pursuing multicultural worship.

The Church Unity Study timeline changed slightly from the project proposal. The focus group met from April 10th to May 1, 2019. Historical and theological components of race were discussed on April 10, 2019. In session one, racial segregation in the mainline church was discussed. In this session, the focus group unpacked the misuse of theology to disenfranchise minorities. On April 24, theoretical components of race were explored. In session three, the focus group discussed critical race themes. In session four, chapters one and four of William Willimon's "Fear of the Other" were discussed. May 1 was devoted to multicultural worship. Cultural Competence was discussed in session five. In session six, the unity service was planned and comparisons between white and black church worship styles were discussed. Session seven was the Juneteenth Unity Service that took place on June 19 at Germantown United Methodist Church. In Session eight, the focus group had a unity service debrief. On June 20-28, one on one exit interviews were conducted.

Summary of Learnings

Method One: Preliminary Questionnaire

Question one asked, can you describe a scenario in which you were the minority?

If so, please explain. The responses were:

1. When I was the youngest black female on a management team. My perspective and management style did not align with the other managers.
2. I have been in meetings where I was the only female and also in education seminars where I was the only white person.
3. I attended a James Brown concert in 1968 as a high school student and was definitely the minority. I was the only white person in the church at a coworker's funeral.
4. I once joined a softball team that was all women, but I was the only white woman on the team.
5. Growing up in Collierville in the 60s, my mother was the only Japanese person in our town. I felt funny, although I was never mistreated.
6. Before I retired from a large corporation, it was not unusual for me to be one of only a few females in meetings.
7. I attended a meeting in which I was the only Caucasian. On several occasions, my husband and I attended a county-wide black history program and were in the minority.
8. I was at a planning meeting for an event at Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church, and I was the only white person in the room with ten African Americans.
9. Yes, being at an Eagle Scout ceremony and worship experience for my friend Andre. In fact, I was the only white person in a black church for this. I did not feel awkward or out of place though because Rev. Crane was a presence in my life, as was his son. He ruled the roost so being with Andre's family sure made me feel that I belonged. If anyone was shaken by my presence, I was unaware because I was having so much fun.
10. I am a woman in a technical role. During college and in the early years of my career, it was not uncommon for me to be significantly outnumbered by men.

Q1 Findings

I was curious about whether or not they could recall encounters in which they were not of the majority. I believe that in order for racial healing to take place in the church, white people should have the capacity to empathize with minorities to some degree. It would be helpful to understand what it feels like to be the minority. I found that most had not experienced ongoing encounters in majority black settings. Several mentioned instances in which they attended a meeting or special worship experience at a black church. An individual, who was the only white person to attend a planning meeting at a black church could recall how many black people were in the room at the time, which says to me that this was a significant moment for that individual. Only one individual recalled an ongoing experience with a black majority. After reading their answers, I concluded that most of the focus group have spent much of their time in social settings in which they are the majority.

Question two asked, do you have at least one close friend who is from a racial and/or ethnic group other than your own? Ten participants responded. Eighty percent responded by saying, “yes,” while twenty percent responded by saying, “no.”

Q2 Findings

Considering their answers to Question one, I was pleased to find that most have at least one friend from a differing ethnic group; however, I somewhat regret phrasing the question this way. I suspect this question was interpreted subjectively. I should have been more specific considering the fact that people tend to perceive the meaning of friendship

differently. If I were to phrase the question differently, I might ask for more background regarding the nature of the friendship.

Question three asked, would you describe churches you've attended as racially mixed or homogeneous? Ten participants responded. One hundred percent would describe their churches as homogeneous.

Q3 Findings

I was not surprised to find that all of my focus group participants have attended racially homogeneous churches nor was I was disappointed. The whole premise of the study is to address the dynamics while discerning whether or not change is possible. Over the course of the study, several mentioned their challenges with this worship structure, recalling instances when they have wrestled with maintaining membership in such settings. The statistics speak to a social structure that many churches have come to accept. One participant mentioned that she chooses to stay in her church because of the relationships she has fostered over the years. Another participant mentioned her involvement and commitment to the music ministry. Though the churches represented in the study are not racially diverse there are other great things about them that their members find meaningful.

Question four asked, how have you encountered racism throughout your life? Nine participants responded while one skipped this question.

1. Being raised in Southern Arkansas and having lived many years in Memphis, I have heard and continue to hear people voice their racist remarks and attitudes toward people who are different. I was in fourth grade when we integrated our public school. I will never forget my parents telling me to be nice to the children who would be coming; but I also remember friends' parents telling them not to have anything to do with the black children.

2. As a child and teenager, I heard racial slurs, “jokes” and I witnessed the mistreatment and distrust of minorities. As an adult I have studied institutional racism.
3. In high school, my school combined with an Afro-American school. This was 1972. It was difficult at first, but things worked out towards the end of the school year.
4. Unfortunately, I have often experienced it from family and friends. Much less now than when I was growing up and also because an adult has more choices than a child or youth.
5. I have observed colleagues treating students in a biased manner.
6. Only as a witness to racism against other people in the form of jokes or derogatory comments behind someone's back. I have not seen racism in overt acts of discrimination.
7. Not much. Alongside my husband and watching it from the role of teacher in schools. I take a very hard line on the subject and always have because entering the working world we called it what it was, hate crimes. Today the line seems to be getting muddled and I would like to see that change. There is a truth to things with a capital T and I think it behooves us to be honest above all, about what life is really like, for everyone. We cannot change if we cannot first be honest about what needs to change. I guess I have stood up to it or ignored it, depending on the situation. I have seen more of it in examples via social media since 2017. No surprise there with DJ Trump in the White House. I blame him for lots of the current rise in people feeling bold in their hateful beliefs. Or being hateful for attention. He is using hate to turn people against one another and distract us from the capital T truths of his life, which is sad and scary. Per original question, I suppose I have surprised people by showing up and looking like I do when my last name is Ortiz. And I have definitely witnessed and been exposed to sexism, as every woman has.
8. I feel I have encountered racism from a place of ignorance and lack of understanding what was actually happening right around me. I am distressed by how long it has taken me to begin any reasonable level of awareness.
9. Yes, coming of age in the 60s helped me see what racism looked like. Now at 68, it is interesting to see the difference, it still exists, but looks different.

Q4 Findings

I happened to notice a common thread among their responses. Several noted experiencing the worst of racism as children in the 60s and 70s, especially during the integration of public schools. Several noted hearing racial slurs and jokes from parents, classmates, and friends. Two educators also mentioned observing racism in their school systems. One participant did not reflect on his or her experiences with racism but rather confessed an ignorance and lack of understanding regarding what may have been happening under his or her nose.

Most of the focus group are baby boomers who were old enough to remember some of the most tumultuous times in our American history regarding race. They have an advantage that my generation (Millennial) does not. They saw with their own eyes what happened when MLK was murdered in our city and as revealed in this survey, their experiences with desegregation played an integral role in shaping their understandings of race. These experiences have made racism real for them.

Question five asked, in your opinion, how much racial diversity does your church have? Answer choices included, “a great deal of diversity, a lot of diversity, a moderate amount of diversity, a little diversity, and not any diversity at all.” Ten percent of the participants believe their current church has a great deal of diversity. Eighty percent observe a little diversity, while ten percent don’t believe their churches have any diversity at all.

Q5 Findings

Most are on the same page regarding their church's racial diversity. Our congregation in particular has two black families that are active and two interracial families. Again, I am afraid this question may have been interpreted subjectively. The notion that we have two black families and two interracial families could seem like a great deal of diversity to some while others may perceive that as marginal. If I were to rephrase this question, I would include a ballpark for each of the choices.

Question six asked, how do you personally feel about your church's level of racial diversity? Answer choices included, "very positive, positive, neutral, negative, or very negative." Ten percent of the participants responded they are positive with their church's level of racial diversity, while forty percent were neutral, and forty percent responded negatively.

Q6 Findings

These statistics indicate a division among personal feelings towards our churches' level of racial diversity. About half responded on the negative spectrum while the other half were either positive about their church's state or neutral, meaning they were not totally concerned about their church's lack of diversity. I found this fascinating. Most of the people who participated in the focus group were selected because they had participated in previous studies that I facilitated. I found it telling that half of this particular group maintain a position of indifference or positivity towards the marginal diversity in their churches. This revelation caused me to question whether or not it is even realistic to think that our churches can cultivate more diversity.

Question seven asked, do you feel your congregation would be open to becoming more diverse? The answer choices included, “very likely, likely, neither likely nor unlikely, unlikely, and very unlikely.” Ten percent responded, “very likely,” sixty percent responded, “likely,” twenty percent responded, “neither likely nor unlikely,” and ten percent responded, “unlikely.”

Q7 Findings

This question concerned their congregations as a whole. These responses are more hopeful. Most of the participants believe their churches would be open to more diversity, while a small percentage assume their churches would maintain a level of indifference or perhaps opposition.

Question eight asked, have you or someone you know left a church in the past because its neighborhood was transitioning to predominantly Black, Latinx, Asian, etc.? Twenty percent said, “yes,” while eighty percent said, “no.”

Q8 Findings

Earlier in my contextual analysis, I unpacked Germantown’s boom back in the 1980’s and 1990’s, which was caused by an influx of white families moving out of the city of Memphis into suburbs, while many black families moved out of the “country” into the city. At that time, many of the predominantly white churches in Memphis were closed and or seemingly abandoned. I was curious about whether or not this group identified with that history. I found that most did not.

Question nine asked, would you say we have become a post-racial society? One hundred percent of the participants said, “no.”

Q9 Findings

I thought this question was timely considering the fact that we would explore this notion during our Critical Race Theory discussion. It delves deeply within colorblind racism which finds its roots in post-racial ideals. I was pleased to find that most do not hold the position that we have become a post-racial society. This was an indicator that perhaps there would not be much resistance on their end as we engaged the CRT material.

Question ten asked, what would you identify as the church’s most significant obstacle in becoming more diverse? The responses are recorded below:

1. Class, status, economics, and churches are not considered neighborhood churches.
2. Germantown demographics, although it is changing, the city remains predominantly white, upper middle class, and traditional family oriented.
3. We live in a community that is not very diverse. As the population ratios change, hopefully, that will change.
4. Fear of change, of losing power/control. Fear of those who are different.
5. I would love to see more people join from all different races, along with bi-racial and mixed-race couples.
6. The biggest obstacle is that Germantown is not a racially diverse city and the church reflects those demographics.
7. Worship style and lack of economic diversity in the community.
8. Overcoming our DNA. Human beings evolved over the course of millions of years. Part of that evolution was sticking very close to your group/tribe/ethnicity. Our survival depended upon identifying with our group

and remaining loyal to it. Groups/tribes/ethnicities protect their own. So, we have evolved naturally distrusting and fearing those who are not “us.”

9. Courage of conviction

10. Ignorance

Q10 Findings

For the most part, their responses were quite different. This speaks to the many variables one must consider when cultivating racial diversity. I also found most of their responses to be spot on. Most spoke of real obstacles the church faces in becoming more diverse. However, I did struggle with one response that alluded to the city of Germantown’s lack of diversity as being the root cause. As previously mentioned in my contextual analysis, Germantown is predominantly white and will remain that way for decades to come but the minority population continues to grow. The town’s athletic center, which is only a couple miles away from the church, is quite diverse, racially. This proves that even in Germantown there are diverse spaces. If the athletic club can become a place for everyone to workout, surely a church down the street can become a place where all people are cherished and welcomed to worship freely.

Method Two- Focus Group Discussions

All of the discussions were recorded and I made a practice of journaling after each session. Below are excerpts from my journal. I begin with sessions one and two, which focused on “Racism in the Mainline Church, Theological Misapplication.”

The conversation began with points in the readings that they found compelling. The first point of interest was the issue of white paternalism in the days of the black

church's formation. The only white man participating in the study, a minister from a neighboring white, Presbyterian church, was quite transparent and demonstrated a bit of vulnerability in sharing a very personal experience that aligned with this topic. He shared that he had been appointed to "oversee" a local black church within his denomination that was in between pastors. He expressed seeing things within the leadership that should be addressed but remains hesitant to speak because he does not want to appear paternalistic or condescending. Members of the focus group sympathized with him but, unfortunately, could not offer any solutions for his very unique situation.

We had an interesting discussion about the American Church's complicity in racism and where this history belongs in the life of our church today. I asked if it is important for churches to educate the congregations on our racist past. They all collectively agreed that it was important. I asked them to envision what this would look like. A couple from my congregation said that it should be a part of confirmation. As the sixth graders learn the history of the Methodist church, they should also learn about our struggle with race. A parishioner from the Presbyterian church mentioned that they have something similar for their middle schoolers but their congregation is so behind with this awareness to the point where the adults really are the ones who need the education most immediately. Others proposed the possibility of our Sunday School classes spending more time delving into this history.

A minister from the Hispanic church shared her experiences moving to America and seeing all of the racial division in the church. She is from Peru where a Methodist church is simply a Methodist church. She also explained the challenges she faces in her Hispanic congregation. They too experience oppression and struggle to find common

ground amongst each other, considering the fact that they all come from different countries in Latin and South America. Not only do they have cultural barriers within their congregation, but they also have language barriers. We were all very intrigued by her insight.

I would say, we had a successful first meeting. All were engaged in the conversation and contributed equally. We decided to have our unity service on Juneteenth. This was actually their idea, not mine. Words cannot express, the hope I felt when they asked if we could have our worship experience on Juneteenth. Many do not know about that very special day, black and white people alike, and it is refreshing to know that they have that awareness. Juneteenth will make this worship experience even more meaningful.

Sessions Three and Four Critical Race Themes, Fear of the Other Book Discussion

The conversations were interesting. Very often we veered off course to discuss other topics that were also important. Most seemed to have a solid understanding about critical race theory. I was concerned most specifically about how they would engage the concept of colorblind racism because I have heard so many white people profess that they do not see color.

Someone posed a question about what constitutes white culture. “What are the markings of white culture?” Another mentioned a drive for power and money but then acknowledged that all people pursue money and power. I found it interesting that no one in the room, mostly white people, could define white culture, yet they have lived their lives in predominantly white communities.

They only black person who attended did not say a word in this session. She seemed disengaged, uninterested. I also noticed a handful of people in the room dominating the conversation. Perhaps her silence was caused by her inability to get a word in. No one even stopped to ask her for her input. We veered off topic to the point where we did not get through most of the discussion questions that I had prepared.

I asked them to define the “other” according to our Germantown-Christian context, many agreed that Muslims and immigrants would be identified as the other. Mention of issues at the border led me to assume they were referring to Latin and South American immigrants. Race is also a factor-with both Muslims and Latin/South American immigrants as they tend to be people of color. Someone also mentioned the poor as the “other.”

Many found the concept of equality versus equity compelling. We had a lengthy discussion about the parallels between the Shelby County School System and the Montgomery School District that was mentioned in *Waking up White*. A participant mentioned the importance of offering support for the children but also “coaching” for the parents. The participating minister from the Presbyterian church asked how do we approach doing such while not coming across as condescending? No one had a good answer for him.

Sessions Five and Six, Cultural Competency and Worship Discussion

After they took their short competency test, we engaged in dialogue about cultural competency. I thought it would be meaningful for them to understand where they lie on the cultural competency continuum. Before stepping into this study, many believed they

were further along than they actually were. It was dire for each of them to understand that though they may feel they are more “woke” than their peers, there is still room for growth. We used a resource from University of California’s Culturally Competent Management Program (CCMP) to guide our discussion. California Culturally Management Program outlines the cultural competence continuum quite succinctly. The continuum ranges from cultural destructiveness, cultural incapacity, cultural blindness, cultural pre-competence, cultural competence, to cultural proficiency.

California Culturally Management Program contends that cultural competence depends on five core competencies that we discussed in depth, institutionalizing cultural knowledge by creating opportunities for everyone to learn about cultural differences and stereotypes, managing dynamics of difference by exploring the effects of historical discrimination, assessing one’s own culture and how it affects others, adapting to diversity by developing skills for cross-cultural communication, and valuing diversity by appreciating the value of including a variety of people in activities.⁶

“Where do our churches fall on the cultural continuum?” Most agreed their churches are culturally blind while some congregants could be considered incompetent and pre-competent. I did not find this reality promising. This helped me realize that our churches must start at ground zero with the institutionalizing of cultural knowledge. We will not be able to accomplish much regarding the adapting and valuing of diversity until we find better ways to create opportunities for learning. The challenge here lies in the fact that if we offer a class on race, only certain people will choose to attend, the “progressives” who always tend to show up. The group discussed this problem in depth

⁶ University of San Diego, “Cultural Competence,” accessed March 1, 2019, https://webtutorials.ucsd.edu/ccmp/01_02_005.html.

and brainstormed about how to foster spaces that would reach those who are resistant to engaging in these conversations. Some suggested that this must be championed by the senior leadership of our churches.

“In what ways can we institutionalize cultural knowledge in our churches?” A couple group members mentioned Christian education classes including a month-long “Seeking Diversity” Sunday School class and “Diversity Dinner” trainings. Another offered to organize a trip to a mosque, as several have open houses in March. It was also proposed that the preachers should be more intentional about pointing out diversity in scripture.

Table 1. Worship elements unique to denominational churches

	White Church	Black Church
Dress	More lenient, formerly Sunday Best, traditional business casual, contemporary- casual	Mostly Sunday Best, Casual for some contemporary
Energy/Atmosphere	Passive, repressive	Active, expressive, call and response, clapping, raised hands, liturgical dancing
Service Length	60 minutes or less	90 minutes or longer
Musical Preferences	Hymns, spirituals, traditional- classical, contemporary-modern instrumentation	Hymns, spirituals, contemporary music, modern instrumentation found even in traditional churches
Preaching	Lecture style with exceptions, storytelling, minimal inflection	Inspirational, personal, overarching themes- overcoming burdens, liberation
Response to Preaching	Silent, unresponsive, Baptists may respond with "Amen"	Expressive standing, clapping, repeating of phrases, "Amen"

After this discussion, we engaged in dialogue about worship elements unique to black and white churches. Our Hispanic friends could not attend this session, so we could not nail down unique markings of the Hispanic church. I thought it would be beneficial to simply sit down and define all of the characteristics among these churches that are unique. The goal here was to explore whether or not there are significant differences in worship cultures as worship preference is often the excuse many use to justify homogenous worship. We explored differences that could potentially hinder us from pursuing diverse worship on a regular basis. We agreed that our groupings were not definitive. For example, while shouting may be attributed to the Black church, we did not assume that there are not white churches that may incorporate shouting into their worship experiences as well. Comparisons were defined by our personal worship experiences. The chart below includes characteristics described specifically by the focus group. It should be made clear that the depictions regarding the white church represent what was spoken during our session.

For each of these characteristics, someone in the room explained that they may have experienced a church of the opposite race that exhibited the same characteristics. As a result, we failed to nail down significant differences between the black and white church. Most of the difference lies in how both churches engage worship. The consensus of the group was that black churches tend to respond more expressively while white churches respond more passively. A participant mentioned that while this seems to be the case, this may not be the way that people would choose to respond. She explained that if white congregants felt empowered to be freer in worship, they would. I have even noticed instances in worship when someone tried to clap after a beautifully sang anthem but

quickly ceased after noticing no one else was clapping. This conversation helped me realize that culturally, differences do exist; but I did not find them compelling enough to pursue homogenous worship as a result. This reinforces my earlier contention that the church is still segregated because we are a byproduct of our terribly racist past. The goal now lies in how we can educate our congregations about the beauty of our cultures while helping them realize how much our churches truly have in common.

We later shifted our focus to the unity service. The order of worship that was presented to the focus group is included below. They were encouraged to review it and offer feedback. They were pleased with the order but were interested in incorporating liturgical dance. We attempted to include a dance team but were unsuccessful. They were also interested in having a reception afterwards with “multicultural” foods. We decided to forgo this simply because we did not know what to expect with the service, regarding numbers.

The participants in the service would be mostly women. I invited the ministers from New Bethel and Germantown Presbyterian to participate but both had planned to be out of town. The participants would include one white male, one Hispanic male, one Hispanic woman, four or five black women (half were in the praise team), two white women, and two or three black men.

I articulated a desire to incorporate traditional and contemporary music, including a couple of African American Spirituals. My passage for the biblical foundations chapter was the primary text. The praise team from New Bethel graciously agreed to participate. Plans to incorporate Spanish music fell through. In lieu of the Spanish music, I asked my friends from El Redentor to recite the Lord’s Prayer in their native language while

administering the sacrament of communion. I had the prayer printed in both English and Spanish. The attendees were encouraged to recite the prayer in Spanish if they were familiar with the language.

The whole premise of this service was to create a diverse worship experience, where various voices that we do not hear or see in our regular worship spaces are finally seen, heard, and cherished. We were driven by this question, “We understand that the mainline church has a diversity problem but what might happen when we intentionally create a worship space for believers who come from different backgrounds?” The goal was to attempt the very thing that we complain hardly exists in the mainline church. The focus group agreed upon the importance of building relationships in our effort to become more diverse and held the position that this could begin with a shared worship experience. Can it truly be done, and if so, is this something that we could pursue long-term? We were anxious to see what would happen.

Session Seven, Juneteenth Unity Service

The focus group and I were quite pleased with the turnout. We had close to ninety members from within our congregation and neighboring congregations. Most were from my church. We had good representation from the predominantly white and black churches but not from the Hispanic church. We were told that it would be difficult for them to travel out to Germantown on a week night. Several from my church sent their regrets as they were out of town on vacations.

The local news called right before we began and asked if they could interview me just before the service would start. I was excited to hear they would be coming but I must

admit, this made me terribly anxious. As the people arrived and took their seats, waiting for the service to start, I stood in the aisle filming with the reporter. Every now and again, I would look around to observe their body language. Some had pensive looks on their faces, while others sat quietly with their arms folded. It was obvious there was an essence of anxiety in the room as no one really knew what to expect. I shared those sentiments.

We began the service with a solo from the worship director at my church. Once he began to sing, I noticed a shift in the room. The music was calming, inviting. After the solo, I gave the welcome and invited them to greet one another. They stood and embraced each other warmly. The sanctuary suddenly filled with the sound of their voices and laughter. Seeing the joy on their faces put me more at ease.

The welcome was followed by a selection from New Bethel's praise and worship team. The team was comprised of mostly young African American men and women. They sang songs that were familiar to me but not to the other congregations. The praise and worship director obviously assumed they would not know their songs and took a moment to teach them. It was a powerful moment in worship seeing the congregation so connected to the worship ensemble. Though they were singing the songs for the first time, I could hear them singing every single word.

My district superintendent was our keynote speaker. We talked beforehand about the nature of project, the sessions I had previously conducted, and our intent for the multicultural Juneteenth gathering. I explained that the participants have attended several studies on race that I have led over the years and those conversations finally culminated into a worship service. I explained that she could expect a group of attendees who were friends and family of my focus group, along with a number of supportive members from

the four churches. Most who would attend could be considered in many ways the “choir” of our churches as they tend to be more informed and concerned about social issues. She was mindful of this but chose not to let them “off the hook” in her message. She began her message by posing the question, “Is there any good news? Really?” She spoke very passionately about the racial disparities that we continue to face in society and the need for the church to do our part in healing them. I wondered initially if she had spoken too harshly to the congregation but later settled that perhaps it was necessary. She stressed that what we were doing was a good start but there is still much more that God is calling to do.

After her message, the ministers from the Hispanic church approached the table to lead communion. We pulled out our hymnals and began reading the liturgy. As the male minister read, I noticed he took his time. He never stumbled on a word but was obviously reading very carefully. At that moment, it dawned on me that he probably never reads the liturgy in English from the hymnal because his congregation’s first language is Spanish. Then I thought to myself, “Why didn’t I ask him to recite the entire liturgy in his native language?” I had already asked them to lead the Lord’s prayer in Spanish but I realized later that none of the liturgy had to be read in English. The very thing that I tried to avoid in creating a multicultural worship experience was happening before my eyes. The goal with multiculturalism is to see, value, and incorporate all cultures, not exclude some for the sake of the group. My Hispanic friends had to give up something valuable for the sake of the group and it hit me like a brick wall. I realized that multicultural worship must be done very carefully and thoughtfully. If proper care is not taken, the worship experience can do more harm. The female minister later recited the prayer in Spanish and

it was beautiful. I encouraged the congregation to read along with the printed prayer if they felt so led but I only heard a few actually reciting it. If they were like me, they may have refrained to simply meditate on her voice. We ended singing “Amazing Grace” and I was pleased to see many stayed afterwards to converse with their neighbors. While the attendees filled out surveys and I took the focus group to another room for our debrief.

Session Eight - Juneteenth Service Debrief

The focus group was excited about how well the service went. I asked if they would like to do again next year. They resoundingly said, “Yes!” They proposed incorporating a mass choir and a multicultural dinner to follow. One suggested we find another location, perhaps at the black church or somewhere in Memphis. Since the Juneteenth holiday remains an important day for African Americans, perhaps it could be held in a predominantly black setting. A participant’s middle-school age son who sat in on the discussion, stressed the importance of Germantown hosting such an event to demonstrate their solidarity. He explained that, sadly, fewer members from the white churches would participate, if held in a black setting. We left our last gathering feeling great about what we just accomplished. The service was a great beginning for what we hoped would evolve into deeper conversations, friendships, and worship gatherings.

Method Three - Juneteenth Participant Survey – Fifty-Seven Participants

Question one asked, were you familiar with Juneteenth before you heard about this worship experience? The participants responded by 66.67 percent saying, yes,” while 33.33 percent said, “no.” Question two asked, do you feel it is necessary for all

Americans to have an awareness of this holiday? Answer choices included, “strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree.” Sixty-one-point forty percent of the participants strongly agreed, 36.84 percent agreed, and 1.75 percent disagreed. Question three asked, before today, had you participated in a multi-ethnic worship experience? Eighty-point seventy percent of the participants had participated in a multi-ethnic worship experience while 19.30 percent had not. Question four asked, if offered the opportunity, would you participate in a multi-ethnic worship experience regularly? Answer choices included, “definitely would, probably would, probably would not, definitely would not.” Sixty-four point-ninety-one percent of the participants definitely would embrace a regular multi-ethnic worship experience, 29.82 percent probably would, and 5.26 percent of the participants probably would not. Question five asked, how many songs did you recognize as African American Spirituals? Fifty-four participants responded while three skipped the question. Sixteen-point-sixty-seven-percent selected zero, 24.07 percent selected one, 33.33 percent selected two, and 25.93 percent selected three.

Question six asked, churches should consider incorporating more Spanish in Sunday morning worship experiences? Answer choices included, “strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly agree.” Seventeen-point fifty-four percent of the participants strongly agreed, 29.82 percent agreed, 38.60 percent neither agreed nor disagreed, 12.28 percent disagreed, and 1.75 percent strongly disagreed. Question seven asked Dr. Smith’s message left you feeling what sentiments? The participants were asked to check all that apply. Answer choices included, “empowered, challenged, offended, enlightened, none of the above.” Fifty-six participants responded while one participant

skipped the question. Twenty-eight-point fifty-seven percent were empowered, 71.43 percent were challenged, 5.36 percent were offended, 30.36 percent were enlightened, and 12.50 percent chose none of the above.

Question eight asked, what did you like most about the worship experience?

Forty-seven participants responded to the question while ten participants skipped the question. Sixteen participants cited the diversity as what they liked most, while ten cited the music, nine cited the message, eight enjoyed everything, three cited communion and one enjoyed the welcoming environment. One participant offered an unwarranted criticism. Question nine asked, what elements and or voices were missing?

Fifteen participants responded while forty-two skipped the question. The responses are listed below:

1. Korean brothers and sisters
2. Young people
3. More guests attending
4. LGBT
5. More participation
6. More Hispanic
7. Children, Asian brothers and sisters
8. A full band
9. Asian
10. Native Americans
11. None
12. A song about freedom without music

13. More people from churches involved in the service
14. More white voices of comparison
15. More spirituals, less hymnals (Two of the songs sang from the hymnal were spirituals.)

Question ten asked, why would you say most churches are still racially segregated today?

Thirty-four participants responded while twenty-three skipped the question. Eleven cited habit and traditions, nine cited worship preferences and “cultural” differences, four cited cultural incompetence, three cited racism, and two cited economics. Fear, pastors, history of distrust, lack of partnerships, and fear of facing our racist past were each cited by one participant.

Juneteenth Unity Service Findings

Question Two: Most agree or strongly agree that all Americans should have an awareness of Juneteenth. I found this promising considering how many people of all races do not know much about Juneteenth. It is great to know that most agree that Juneteenth should be a holiday all Americans understand the importance of. Pursuing events such as this can have a great impact in bridging racial barriers among our churches. These events would demonstrate most especially the white churches’ standing in solidarity with the black churches. In order to break racial barriers our churches should invest in the issues that concern our neighbors of other races.

Question Four: The majority of the participants said they most definitely or probably would attend a multicultural worship experience on a regular basis if offered the opportunity. I found this promising and intriguing. This alludes to the fact that the racial

separation is not exactly caused by the church's personal desire but rather by historical and societal factors.

Question Five: I asked the group to identify the number of songs they recognized as African American Spirituals. While there were two songs incorporated into the worship experience, nine people said they were not any, thirteen identified one, probably the most popular one, "Precious Lord," and fourteen said there were three. Only eighteen of the participants answered the question correctly. I was curious about this considering how prominent African American spirituals seem to be in worship for white churches.

Question Six: I asked if they agreed with the notion that churches should incorporate more Spanish in Sunday morning worship experiences. They were quite divided on this concept. Twenty-seven agreed, while thirty were either neutral or in disagreement. These numbers speak to the fact that while many have an interest in building bridges among black people that sentiment is not always shared for Hispanic people. We have room for growth with both efforts. I asked this question mainly because Latinos represent fifty-two percent of the United States population growth since 2008. Considering how rapidly their presence is growing in America, it may be helpful to welcome them into our congregations by incorporating more Spanish.

Question Eight: They were asked to describe what they liked most about the worship experience. The two common threads were the diversity and music. The music led by the black church seemed to be the most significant component. I participant expressed to me afterwards how powerful that moment in worship was. She explained that she never felt so connected to a praise and worship ensemble before. As mentioned earlier, they were intentional about teaching the songs to the congregation and walked

them through the song entirely. The praise and worship portion were a shared experience, not a performance and she appreciated that. Several were quiet affirming of Dr. Smith's message and communion as well.

Question Ten: I posed the question about why they believed most churches are still racially segregated today. This was the most skipped question on the survey. Thirty-five participants responded, while twenty-two skipped it. Common responses included racism, traditions, old habits, economics, lack of cultural understanding, and worship preferences. One participant cited pastors while another mentioned our history of separateness that has led to distrust. I agreed most with the latter.

Method Four CALL Assessment

Ten participants from the focus group took the CALL Assessment. Most scored in the CHRIS category while one scored in the ALEX category. The ALEX group appreciate culturally diversity but assume that diverse groups can still benefit from assuming mainstream values. The participant who scored in this category expressed that she was surprised she did not score in the most culturally competent group, CHRIS, but realized after taking the test that she does have room for growth. She confessed that she is not quite there yet but appreciates knowing where she currently stands so that she can continue to take the steps necessary in her journey towards cultural competence.

Method Five - Exit Interviews

Ten of the focus group participants were interviewed following the Juneteenth Unity Service. They each were interviewed from thirty minutes to an hour. The following questions were asked of the participants:

1. What might be wrong with having a black church, an Asian church, a white church, and a Hispanic church? Should we all become part of one integrated institution? If not, what should the goal be? Most explained that diversity in worship is incredibly enriching and we miss out on something beautiful when segregated. While appreciating diversity, they acknowledge the sins of the past that have led to divisions that may be irreversible. Several spoke about cultures that have been fostered over the centuries that should not be given up simply for the sake of diversity. This was noted of the black church specifically by both the black and white participants.
2. I am going to read a statement and let me know if you agree or disagree: "If my basic church experience is with people like myself, I am suffering nutritionally." All of the white participants agreed with the statement, while the black participant strongly disagreed and was close to being offended by the question. She explained that she would not be who she is without the black church. The black church nurtured her and she thrives in the world because of them. I shared with her that I could identify with that. I agreed that the black church today is one of the few places where black people can go to simply be themselves. In a world where we are the minority in most settings, the black church offers community and safety. I articulated that the black church taught me the history of black pioneers, ones who were largely excluded from the history books. I doubt I would be able to thrive in predominantly white spaces, if I did not have the black church as child, helping me to discover my identity and the richness of our history, while offering a retreat from the troubles of the world that in many instances included racism.
3. Which of the readings did you find most intriguing? Most cited the historical readings as they had no previous knowledge about the mainline church's disturbingly racist past.
4. What struck you the most about the unity service? They responses were similar to the worship service participants. They too enjoyed the diversity of voices, the preaching, and the musical components.

Conclusion

I began with the hypothesis that my congregation, along with other mainline churches, can only break racial barriers by intentionally fostering authentic relationships with people of color while cultivating a deeper understanding and sensitivity to racial issues that plague our society. My project revealed that this is easier said than done mainly because cultural incompetence and indifference plagues many of our congregations. When offering opportunities for racial dialogue and diverse worship experiences, the same core of people will choose to participate. My focus group resolved that somehow topics regarding issues of race must be institutionalized in a way in order for all congregants. We agreed that ignorance prevents many from having a seat at the table but perhaps if they understood truly how and why the church as it stands today is a byproduct of a racist past, they may be more intentional about bridging the gap. As previously mentioned, for those who have succumbed to what I call the “white bubble effect,” racism is simply a myth, one they choose not to entertain.

Another issue discovered in my project is the black church’s seeming disinterest in building bridges. I explained to my focus group that the Methodist movement in America began as a diverse movement. Initially, black and white people worshipped together but eventually succumbed to societal pressures to segregate themselves. Only then, black congregants, feeling pushed out, choose to foster their own worship experiences. Asking the black church to walk away from homogeneous worship after they were pushed away from white congregants centuries ago is an ambitious request that seems insensitive and even racist, considering the concept of colorblind racism. After pursuing this project, I realized that multicultural worship must be done carefully and

thoughtfully so not to do harm. We must also accept the fact because the wounds cut terribly deep, many churches, especially black churches may be healthier in their current state.

While my hypothesis can be challenging for many churches, I strongly believe that steps can be taken to bridge racial barriers. Though segregation on Sunday morning remains a problem, it must be noted that so many things must happen before that could change, if ever, for some churches. Something must first be done about racial ignorance and cultural incompetence. Martin Luther King, Jr. articulated in his Letter from the Birmingham Jail many decades ago that race relations could improve if white pastors felt charged to speak about it more to their congregations. I would contend that even in 2019 it would be tremendously helpful. This could resolve the institutionalizing of knowledge problem previously mentioned.

The Juneteenth Unity Service was a success so much so that members from my focus group insist that we make this as an annual gathering. I believe that if we continue to embrace events such as this, our relationships will continue to strengthen. The barriers of distrust will finally be broken and more will finally feel comfortable engaging conversations on race and diversity that must be had before diversity in worship can be realized. This is not a simple endeavor, but I am grateful for the strides we have made throughout this journey. This project was simply about sowing seeds and I have so much joy seeing what steps the focus group has taken since the project concluded. One recently has shared the readings discussed with her Sunday School class, while others are strategizing how they can lead other small groups to further our conversations. Juneteenth was a great start for us and I cannot wait to see what else God has in store.

APPENDIX A

JUNETEENTH UNITY SERVICE PROGRAM

Juneteenth Unity Service
Germantown UMC Sanctuary
June 19, 2019
6pm

Order

Prelude- “You are Welcome Here” Todd Wilson, Worship Director (Germantown UMC)

Welcome- Rev. Erin Beasley

Call to Worship

“Bless the Lord with Me”- Praise Team (New Bethel)

Juneteenth Remembrance- Rev. Erin Beasley

Prayer Song- “I Give Myself Away” Praise Team (New Bethel)

Prayers of the People- Mrs. Trish Stephenson (GUMC)

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:12-27- Mrs. Shirlee Clark-Barber (GUMC)

“Precious Lord Take My Hand” United Methodist Hymn 474

Message- Rev. Dr. Deborah Smith- Metro District Superintendent

Communion- Rev. Goyo De La Cruz and Rev. Luz Campos (El Redentor UMC)

“Let Us Break Bread Together” United Methodist Hymn 618

Invitation “Amazing Grace” United Methodist Hymn 378

Benediction and Response- “Bind Us Together” FWS 2226

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